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Selections from  
Cowper's Letters

*EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY*

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ALLAHABAD

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## PREFACE.

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The Letters annotated in this edition are those selected as a text-book for the Intermediate Examination by the Allahabad University. The Notes do not pretend to any originality and I have to acknowledge my indebtedness especially to the excellent works of Mr. W. I. Webb in his edition of Cowper's Letters, published by Macmillan. But I have made my Notes as full as possible, having in mind the needs of Indian students to whom many points, which are obvious enough to English readers, present difficulties.

H. M.



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## INTRODUCTION.

### I.—THE TIMES IN WHICH COWPER LIVED.

There are few eminent men of letters in whose case an understanding of the times in which they lived is less necessary for an appreciation of their works, than William Cowper. Milton cannot be fully appreciated without a knowledge of the politics of the Great Rebellion; but his disciple, Cowper, lived such a secluded life, that his character and writings can be very well understood without much reference to the policy of Pitt and the plans of George III. No man, however, can live wholly apart from his times, and Cowper was really as much a product of his age as Milton was of his; and, though Cowper lived as a literary hermit, he was no uninterested spectator of the stirring doings of his day. Even in his letters we find frequent references to great political events: and as we sit, so to speak, with him in his greenhouse at Olney, listening to his gossip on books, and flowers, and village doings, we occasionally hear the boom of distant guns from great battlefields (Letter 13), the subdued hum of political strife (Letter 20), the muffled uproar of London mobs, and echoes of the awful doings in the streets of Paris (Letter 48). Before painting Cowper's portrait, it will be well, therefore, to sketch in, as a background to the picture, the times in which he lived.

#### 1. *Political events and movements.*

As Cowper was born in 1731 and died in 1800, his life covered more than two-thirds of the 18th century—the period that was in so many ways the introduction to modern England, and, indeed, to modern Europe. When he was born, Walpole was at the height of his power in England, and the House of Hanover, in the person of George II., seemed to be firmly established on the English throne. When Cowper was a boy of 14, at Westminster School, the



Jacobites made their last attempt to upset the new order, and the defeat of the Young Pretender secured the final establishment of the principles of the peaceful Revolution of 1688. Cowper's youth in London was largely spent in the glorious days of Pitt's great ministry, and he was a young man of 29 years old when the great victories of 1759 and 1760 placed England in a supreme position in the world's politics. The year he went mad (1763) was marked by the commencement of the new king, George III.'s, attempt to regain the power of the crown by dividing the old Whig party, and rallying the Tories to his side. From his retirement in Olney he watched with interest the constitutional struggle that centred round the person of Wilkes, the blundering policy that resulted in the American War of Independence, the Anti-Popery movement and the Lord George Gordon riots, the rise of our Indian Empire under Clive and Warren Hastings, and the beginning and progress of the French Revolution. In the last years of his life, though he could take little interest in anything, the great wars between England and revolutionary France began, and Napoleon was commencing his marvellous career of conquest and empire.

In most of these great events and movements Cowper took a keen interest, and though he could take no part in them, he watched them "through the loopholes of his retreat" as he put it, by means of "that map of busy life," the newspaper. And when he expresses his opinions on current politics, he does so with moderation and judgment. Of course, he looked at everything from the Whig standpoint, being an old-fashioned Whig all his life from family tradition and preference: but he shows a great deal of good-humoured tolerance of opposite opinions.

## 2. *The Religious Revival.*

At the beginning of Cowper's life, religion and morality were at a very low ebb in England. The Church was dead as a religious force, and the Nonconformists had lost their religious enthusiasm and were given up in the main to

Whig politics. In society, fashionable men and women covered up gross immorality with fine clothes and extravagantly polite manners. The lower orders were sunk in gross ignorance, and in superstition or coarse scepticism : their pleasures were brutal and rough—drunkenness, gambling, cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and the like. The criminal law was harsh and savage, politics were utterly corrupt, and the forms of free government made a farce by unblushing bribery and place-hunting. Literature had lost all its originality and freshness, and had become commonplace and artificial.

The great Methodist Revival was in many ways the beginning of better things. The Holy Club, started at Oxford by John and Charles Wesley, was the germ from which sprang the greatest religious movement of modern times. Led by the Wesleys, and the great revivalist preacher, Whitefield, this movement began to spread over England when Cowper was a boy. It resulted in the creation of the greatest Protestant church of modern times, that of Methodism, the quickening of the Church of England and the old Nonconformist bodies, an immense improvement in the morality of the country, especially of the lower classes, and the creation of a spirit of philanthropy that eventually brought about the amelioration of the criminal law, the reform of the prison system, the abolition of the slave-trade, and the founding of many admirable charitable institutions.

This great religious and moral revival, which Mr. Lecky, (the historian of the eighteenth century), says saved England from the horrors of a French Revolution, was of the greatest importance to Cowper's work as a poet. When he recovered from his second attack of madness in 1763, Cowper was "converted," and enthusiastically adopted the beliefs and practices of the Methodists, although, like many others, he remained a member of the English Church. His letters show how earnest and enthusiastic his religious feelings were, and how all his literary work was inspired

by a religious motive. Cowper, indeed, became the poet of evangelicalism and philanthropy, the best literary exponent of the feelings and ideas of the evangelical party. We may, perhaps, understand Cowper apart from the politics of his time, but we cannot understand either his poems or his letters unless we take into consideration the great influence of the Methodists and of the evangelical and philanthropical parties of the latter half of the 18th century.

### 3. *The Industrial Revolution.*

Not only did Cowper see the great changes in the manners and morals of English social life caused by the religious revival, but also something of the beginning of that great industrial revolution which introduced the age of steam and electricity to manufactures and commerce, and which made England "the workshop of the world." James Watt patented his single-acting pumping steam-engine in 1769; and the year 1785, when Cowper was 54 years old, marked the turning-point in England's history as a manufacturing country, for in that year Watt's engine was first employed to work a cotton-mill. Before Cowper's death, the inventions of Hargreaves, Arkwright and Compton, had revolutionised the English spinning and weaving industries. England was changing rapidly from an agricultural country to the greatest manufacturing country of the world.

## 2—LIFE OF COWPER.

### 1. *His family and boyhood.* (1731—1749).

William Cowper belonged to a good old Whig family. His father, the Rev. John Cowper, was Rector of Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, and chaplain to King George II.; his grandfather, Spencer Cowper, was a well known Judge of Common Pleas; and his great-uncle, Sir William Cowper (created the first Earl Cowper), was Lord Chancellor under Queen Anne and King George I. Through his mother, a Donne, he had royal blood in his veins, for through the noble houses of West, Knollys, Carey, Bullen, Howard, and Mowbray, she was descended from King

Henry III. What was perhaps more to the purpose, he had also as one of his ancestors a noted poet, Dr. Donne, the famous Dean of St. Paul's, whose queer, metaphysical poems marked an important transition in the history of English poetry in the days of the Stuarts. So, as Goldwin Smith says, "A Whig and a gentleman he was by birth, a Whig and a gentleman he remained to the end."

William Cowper was born in his father's rectory at Great Berkhamstead, on Nov. 26, 1731. From the first he was a delicate child, and no doubt inherited that extreme sensitiveness and tendency to melancholy which afterwards deepened into periodic insanity. When he was only six years old, he lost his mother; and, as there never seemed to be much sympathy between him and his father, the loss was a serious one for so sensitive a child. She must have made a very deep impression on the child's affectionate nature; for, when he was 58 years old, the sight of his mother's portrait was sufficient to inspire him with one of his best short poems, and one of his best letters (See Letter 38, and notes). Soon after his mother's death he was sent to a boarding-school at Market Street, where he suffered more than most boys of his age from the bullying and fagging common in these days, and from loneliness and home-sickness. It was his experience there that chiefly inspired his poem *Tirocinium* (published in 1785; see Letters 22, 23, 24, and notes), in which he denounced the boarding-school system and advocated home education. He did not stay long at this school, however; but, having been placed for two years under the care of an oculist on account of inflamed eyes, from which he suffered all his life (see Letter 52, etc.), he was sent to Westminster School, then at the height of its fame. Here he was happier than he had been in the private school, though doubtless he suffered much from rough and often brutal treatment from the elder boys. However, though nervous and constitutionally delicate, he must have had a fair amount of physical strength, for he was considered a good cricketer and football player. Vincent Bourne, an odd

character but a good Latin scholar and something of a poet, was the master under whom Cowper studied, and to whom he doubtless owed his classical scholarship and his taste for Greek and Latin poetry. In later life Cowper spoke of him with admiration and affection (See Letters 8 and 17 : and Notes to Letter 7). Amongst his schoolfellows at Westminster were some who afterwards became famous, notably Charles Churchill, poet and satirist, and Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of India.

2. *His youth in London: legal studies, literary work, and social life.* (1749—1765).

Perhaps because of the traditions of legal greatness in the family, Cowper's father decided to make him a lawyer, and when he left school he was articled to a Mr. Chapman, an attorney in London. Cowper, however, had neither inclination nor special aptitude for the law, and he never seems to have worked seriously at his profession. He spent a good deal of time with his cousins, Theodora and Harriet Cowper, the daughters of his uncle, Ashley Cowper. His friendship with Theodora ripened later into love, and he would have married her, but her father forbade the match. Harriet (afterwards Lady Hesketh) renewed the acquaintanceship in after life, and to her some of the most charming of Cowper's letters were addressed (See Letter 27, and Notes : also Letter 28 and Notes). Cowper's fellow-clerk in Mr. Chapman's office was Thurlow, afterwards the famous Chancellor.

After three years spent in this way, Cowper took chambers (1752) in the Temple, and was eventually (1754) called to the Bar. But he spent most of his time in literature, and in attendance at a literary and social association called the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster old boys (Bonnell Thornton, Colman, Lloyd, Joseph Hill, Bensley, De Grey, and Cowper himself : see Letter 25, and notes). The only one of these who kept up his early friendship with the poet in later life, was Joseph Hill (See Letter 2, and Notes). He wrote articles in various

magazines, and began to dabble a little in poetry, writing some translations, ballads, and odes to "Delia"—"Delia" being his cousin, Theodora Cowper.

In 1756 Cowper's father died; and he has recorded how much he felt the loss of his old home. His friends procured for him a small post in the Civil Service, with a salary of £ 60 a year, but he resigned this from nervousness after some time, and Major Cowper, a kinsman, secured for him the nomination to the office of Clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords in 1763. This was the occasion, though not the real cause, of the great crisis in Cowper's life, for it led to his most serious attack of suicidal insanity. As has been already explained, Cowper was delicate from birth, and was all his life afflicted by constitutional over-sensitiveness and shyness. He had had a mild attack of insanity in 1752, when he had moved into his chambers in the Temple, and had taken a holiday at Southampton to recover his health with his cousin, Harriet Cowper, and her future husband,—Mr. Thomas Hesketh (See Letter 26). But now the malady returned with terrible violence. The root of the evil was undoubtedly physical, being simple hypochondria arising from constitutional weakness; but it was aggravated and brought to a head at this time by Cowper's external circumstances. He was living at this time a lonely life, and solitude was the worst thing possible for such a nature. He had lost his father and his old home; he had been separated from the woman he loved; he was worried with financial difficulties; and he had little prospect of success in his profession: only a touch was needed to bring on another attack, and that touch was supplied by circumstances connected with this nomination to the office of Clerk of the Journals. Before he could be appointed, he had to be publicly examined before the House of Lords. His already diseased imagination filled him with unreasonable terror of the ordeal, and he went mad. His madness took a suicidal form, and he five times attempted to take his life—twice by laudanum, once by drowning, once with

a knife, and lastly by hanging. The last attempt nearly succeeded, for he owed his life only to the breaking of the garter by which he was suspended. His relations were sent for, and, after trying other means (see note to Letter 1.), placed him under the care of Dr. Cotton at St. Alban's, in whose private asylum he remained for eighteen months. His mania had by then taken a religious form, and he imagined he was eternally lost. His recovery, in 1765, also took a religious form; the awful cloud of religious despair suddenly lifted one morning, and, as he himself put it, "immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me." Dr. Cotton soon after discharged his patient as cured. He suffered, as we shall see, all though his life from attacks of madness; but till the last three melancholy years, they were only of a temporary character, and the religious change remained permanent. From this day Cowper was a devout Christian of the evangelical school.

3. *His life at Huntingdon and Olney, before he began to write.* (1765—1780).

After his recovery, his brother John, who was at Cambridge, secured him lodgings in the quiet little town of Huntingdon; and, as he was quite unfit to follow any serious pursuit, several of his relatives clubbed together to provide him with a modest income. At first he was happy enough in his newly-found religious joy, and amused himself with his books and with riding over to Cambridge to see his brother. But presently he began to feel his loneliness, and his lot might have become very unhappy had he not met some people who were to be his companions for the greater part of his life. These were the members of the Unwin family—the Rev. William Unwin, a clergyman who lived in Huntingdon, and took pupils in his house; his wife, Mrs. Unwin, and his son, William, who was studying for holy orders (see Notes to Letters 34 and 3). They noticed the stranger at Church, and the son, William Unwin, introduced himself to him one Sunday

morning. Cowper quickly took to the new family, and soon after became an inmate of their house. They were earnest Christians, of the evangelical sort, and Cowper found them sympathetic friends in his new religious experience. He has described (in Letter 1.) his daily life, with its routine of religious observances, softened by real affection and common-sense. Though he could not know it then, he had found in Mrs. Unwin one who all the rest of his days supplied the place of a true mother to him. Though a strictly religious woman, Mrs. Unwin was warm-hearted and common-sensed and had a good deal of quiet humour: the constant care and devoted affection she shewed towards poor Cowper all the rest of her life probably saved him from chronic insanity, and made it possible for him to do his work as a poet.

Two years after Cowper joined this household, the Rev. William Unwin was killed by a fall from his horse, when Mrs. Unwin, her son, and Cowper moved to Olney, a village in Buckinghamshire, where a noted evangelical clergyman, the Rev. John Newton, was curate. (See Note to Letter 5). Newton was a remarkable man. He had been the captain of a slave-trader's ship, and had had a wild and adventurous youth. He was suddenly converted to religion after a narrow escape from shipwreck, and became a religious enthusiast. As a clergyman he was a thorough Methodist in his enthusiasm and zealous evangelical preaching, and attained to some fame as a revivalist and religious writer. His influence on Cowper, however, was unhappy. Though he was a kind and warm-hearted man, his religion was too strict and narrow to have anything but a depressing effect on Cowper's sensitive mind. He got morbid ideas of duty, cut himself off from his relatives and "worldly" friends, shunned amusements as sinful, and spent his days in an exacting round of religious services, prayers and charitable works. As was proved afterwards, the bright and sunny influence of such ladies as Lady Austen and Lady Hesketh was much better for for his mental and religious health. Anyway, whatever the



cause, a few years after settling in Olney, Cowper suffered from a third attack of his malady. In 1773 he again went mad, and tried to kill himself. Mrs. Unwin devoted herself to him, and for sixteen months attended him alone, for he refused to have anyone else with him. At last, however, Dr. Cotton had again to be called in, and it was only after months of treatment by him that Cowper recovered his reason.

Soon after, Newton left Olney, having been appointed vicar of the parish of St. Mary Woolnoth, in London. Cowper did not like his successor, the Rev. Thomas Scott : but struck up a friendship with a dissenting minister of the neighbouring town of Newport Pagwell. (See Note to Letters 14 and 15).

Olney was a very quiet and dull little place. There was no society for Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, and William Unwin had by this time left them to take up his duties as a clergyman elsewhere. To occupy his mind and prevent a return of his terrible melancholy, Cowper took up several hobbies in turn. (See Letter 36). He tried carpentering, and boasts of having made "better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or birdcages," than any squire in the county. Then he learnt drawing from a local artist (see Letter 5, and Notes), and amused himself with making pictures. Gardening he had always been fond of, and in tending his plants and building his greenhouse (see Letter 15), he found much interest. Even at Huntingdon he had been a gardener, and writing then to his friend Joseph Hill (May 14, 1767), he says: "Having commenced gardening, I study the arts of pruning, sowing, planting, and enterprise everything in that way from melons down to cabbages." Moreover, being very fond of animals, he had many pets. His tame hares (See Letter 6 and Notes) have become famous in literature ; and he had besides at different times five rabbits, two guinea-pigs, two dogs, a magpie, a jay, a starling, canaries, pigeons, goldfinches, and linnets. (See Letters 4 and 17).

His days were passed very quietly in this retired village. The country about Olney was flat and marshy, and the scenery uninteresting; but he enjoyed his daily rambles, alone or with Mrs. Unwin. In the evening he had his books, and enjoyed reading aloud some biography or book of travels. From his seclusion he watched with interest the stirring doings of his time through the newspapers, and his occasional judgments on political events are characterised by moderation and sound common-sense.

4. *His career as a poet.* (1780—1790).

He was now nearly fifty years old, and probably if these simple pleasures had been sufficient to ward off the return of his malady, the world would never have heard of him as a poet. But such pursuits did not sufficiently occupy his mind, and to prevent his yielding to his constant tendency to depression, Mrs. Unwin suggested his cultivating his gift for poetry. He had already helped Newton in compiling a hymn-book, contributing to it what are known as the "Olney Hymns," but he now set to work to do some more serious work. His career as a poet began.

The subject which Mrs. Unwin suggested was a "Moral Satire" on *The Progress of Error*. Newton was consulted, and the poem and the others which followed were written under his strict religious supervision. This was unfortunate, as it hampered Cowper's natural gaiety of manner (for, when not oppressed by melancholy his disposition was bright and cheerful), and made his writings too obviously moral and religious in character and aim. When the *Progress of Error* was finished, he wrote *Truth*, *Table Talk*, *Expostulation*, *Hope*, *Charity*, and *Retirement*. These were published in one volume by Joseph Johnson, the publisher, in March, 1782. (See Letters 7, 8, 9, 10.). This first volume, though containing some good poetry, cannot be said to have been a success, and it was rather severely criticised at the time. If he had written no more, Cowper would never have been counted as one of England's great poets.

Before this volume was published, Cowper formed a friendship which was to have a great influence on him as a poet; for if Mrs. Unwin inspired his first volume, Lady Austen inspired his second. In 1781 Lady Austen, widow of a wealthy baronet, paid a visit to her sister, the wife of a clergyman near Olney, and between her and Cowper and Mrs. Unwin a warm friendship sprang up. Soon after she came to live in Olney in the house where Newton had lived, and the new friends spent most of their time together. Lady Austen had lived long in France; she was gay, witty, and fascinating, but warm-hearted and good. She had an almost magical effect on Cowper's spirits, and infected him with something of her own vivacity and gaiety. It was she who told him the story of "John Gilpin" one evening. He lay awake most of the night laughing to himself over it, and in the morning produced the poem that is the best of playful ballads. (See Letters 22, 23, 25, 28, and Notes). It was Lady Austen also who inspired his longest poem, on which his fame as a poet rests,—*The Task*. She was advising him to try to write something in blank verse, when he objected that he had no subject. "Oh," she replied, "you can write on anything. Take the Sofa," (on which at the time she was reclining). Cowper was taken with the idea, and began a poem on *The Sofa*, which grew eventually into a long work in six books, to which he gave the general title of *The Task*—because he regarded the writing of it all as "a task" set him by his lady friend. (See Letters 22, 24).

*The Task*, along with *Tirocinium*, (see above), and *John Gilpin*, was published in 1784, and at once made Cowper famous. The retirement-loving hermit, in his secluded village, suddenly became a public character. Complimentary letters were sent to him; strangers came to visit Olney to see the new poet; famous painters asked to be allowed to paint his portrait; his relatives began to take a pride in him; and old London friends, such as Colman and Thurlow, from when he had heard nothing

for many years, suddenly remembered him and reopened the long discontinued correspondence. Amongst many presents that came to him must be mentioned an annual gift of £ 50 which began to come regularly at this time from an anonymous friend. The donor was in all probability his early love, Theodora Cowper, who, though separated from him, never forget him.

This second volume also brought to Cowper what was to be more valuable to him than fame—the renewed friendship of his cousin, Lady Hesketh, Theodora's sister. He needed her the more just then because, before he had finished writing *The Task*, he had lost the friendship of the lady who had inspired it. Lady Austen had left Olney, and broken off all connection between herself and Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. The reason of this breach of their friendship is difficult to discover, but it may have arisen from some jealousy on the part of the two ladies, or some disappointment on the part of Lady Austen. Her place, however, was now taken by Lady Hesketh, who, reading *John Gilpin*, wrote at once to her cousin a kind and affectionate letter. Cowper's reply is given here as Letter 27 ; and from that day the correspondence was kept up to the end of his life. Lady Hesketh was as vivacious and bright as Lady Austen, and she had more common sense and steadiness of character. She visited Olney, and busied herself about Cowper's comfort. She persuaded him and Mrs. Unwin (in 1786) to leave the inconvenient and unhealthy house at Olney for a better one, Weston Lodge, standing on higher ground near the neighbouring village of Weston Underwood. This led to a close friendship with his Catholic neighbours, the Throckmortons of Weston Hall, (see Letter 40). Cowper's letters to Lady Hesketh from this time onward, with their gay and happy tone, their affectionate expressions, and their references to many thoughtful acts of kindness on the part of his cousin, show how valuable her friendship was to him.

Soon after their removal to Weston, they had the sorrow of losing by death Mrs. Unwin's son, William Unwin (see Letter 30); and, in spite of the more healthy surroundings, Cowper suffered a fourth attack from his mental malady (1787), and again made an attempt on his life. He recovered, however, and for a few years more carried on his literary work. He wrote a good many short poems, which contain some of his best efforts. But a great part of his time and energy was, unhappily, taken up in producing a translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into English verse, (see Letter 28, etc.), which was finished in 1790 and published in 1791.

5. *Last years*: (1791—1800).

From this time Cowper's health became gradually worse. He began a long poem on *The Four Ages of Man* (see Letter 44) which he never finished, and undertook to edit a new edition of Milton's poetical works towards which, however, he made only the translations of Milton's Latin and Italian poems. His constitutional hypochondria settled down upon him and became chronic. What made matters worse was that the health of Mrs. Unwin, who had so devotedly tended him for so many years, also began to fail. She had a stroke at the end of 1791 (see Letter 46), and, though she recovered for a time, her health was permanently broken. A new friend, William Hayley, the poet, came to the rescue, and invited both the invalids to his house at Earham, on the coast of Sussex, in the hope that the change and sea-air might do them good. To Cowper, so long used to a quiet life of retirement, the journey of three days by coach seemed a formidable undertaking, but it was accomplished successfully in August, 1792 (see Letters 47, 48). The change however, produced no permanent effect, and after their return to Weston, both Cowper and Mrs. Unwin grew steadily worse. Lady Hesketh's health, too had broken down, and she had been obliged to go to Bath, and afterwards to Clifton. Hayley again came to the rescue, and along with Cowper's cousin, the Rev. John

Johnson (see Letter 39), sent them to the Norfolk coast (see Letters 52 and 53). But in 1796, not long after their arrival, Mrs. Unwin died. Cowper at the time was so sunk in melancholy, that he scarcely seemed conscious of his loss. He lived three years longer in a state of constant depression, rarely alleviated by lucid intervals. That poem so terribly expressive of his despair,—*The Castaway*—was written at this time. At last on the morning of 25., 1800, he died very peacefully at Dereham, in Norfolk.

### 3. COWPER'S CHARACTER.

In considering Cowper's character, we must remember that all his life he suffered from a frail physical constitution, and from his distressing mental malady. His fits of melancholy and even despair, his shyness, and his love of retirement, were probably all more or less due to physical or mental weakness; for naturally he seems to have been of a very affectionate, social, and merry disposition. Happily even his ill-health was not able to repress completely his natural liveliness, and in consequence he rarely wrote a letter or a poem that is wholly melancholy, whereas he has written many that are wholly gay.

(1) In reading his letters, we soon feel what a warm, affectionate heart Cowper had. He had a great capacity for friendship, which was increased by his need of friends owing to his physical and mental frailty; and he responded to the smallest kindnesses with a wealth of loving gratitude. This warm-hearted affection is most evident, perhaps, in his letters to his cousin,—Lady Hesketh, but it is abundantly present in his letters to all his friends. There must have been in him something very loveable, for wherever he had made a friend, he generally was able to keep him for life. His love for animals is well known, and his sympathy with the poor and the unfortunate, though less known, was not less a reality.

(2) What strikes us not less in the letters are his humour, gaiety, love of innocent fun, and cheerfulness. People have greatly exaggerated Cowper's melancholy. There

were times, of course, when he suffered from terrible depression, and even despair; but, as we have seen, such overclouded days were due to his malady, and they were only periodic, until they became constant in the last three years of his life. Such moods are not often reflected in his letters, partly because he did not write much when they were on him, and partly because he had the brave unselfishness to keep them to himself. Naturally, as has been said, Cowper was happy and lively, and full of fun and humour. His letters are full of humorous touches and laughable descriptions, and many were written throughout in the gayest of spirits.

(3) Cowper's natural sensitiveness was doubtless exaggerated by his malady. He was shy, retiring, and nervous; felt very quickly and keenly any neglect or apparent unkindness on the part of friends; and positively dreaded encounters with strangers. The mere fear of being publicly examined by the House of Lords helped to drive him mad, and the announcement of a lady visitor made "his spirits sink ten degrees." His love of retirement was due to no surly unsociability, but to a sensitiveness that made intercourse with unsympathetic strangers a torture to him.

(4) It is scarcely necessary to add to this that a man so sensitive and shy, and moreover a poet, was not a man of affairs. In worldly matters and business concerns he was a child and altogether impractical. Even if his health had not broken down he could never have succeeded as a lawyer. After his attack of madness in 1763 he was cared for and protected by relatives and friends. His friend, Joseph Hill, managed his money affairs; Mrs. Unwin tended him like a mother and sick-nurse; his relatives provided him with enough to live on; and his friends surrounded him with kindness. Yet he was by no means a fool. He had plenty of common sense, and shows a good deal of sound wisdom in his comments on the political doings of the day; he was a thinker and dreamer more than a doer, a passive watcher of events rather than an active worker.

(5) In connection with his sensitiveness we must note Cowper's refinement of taste. It is remarkable that, in a coarse age, Cowper never wrote a line that even borders on vulgarity. His fun and humour was always in good taste, and both letters and poems are the pure expressions of a delicate and cultured mind. This refinement of taste was, perhaps, partly due to his sincere religion, but in the main it was natural, and part of that sensitiveness to which vulgarity and coarseness were as painful as dust to the eye.

(6) Cowper was a man of very simple tastes and habits. His love of retirement was no pose. He was really happy in secluded Olney, with his little garden and greenhouse, his pets, his books, and simple domestic pleasures. There was not a grain of conceit or vanity in his whole nature. Humble, self-depreciating, simple-minded, sincere, he had the spirit of a child, and its innocence. Above all things he hated sham, humbug and ostentation. "Affectation," he said, "is an emetic."

(7) Yet there was no lack of dignity in him. He was always the refined gentleman, who knew how to stand on his honour and, he could show considerable firmness when there was occasion. His poems show what a fund of righteous indignation he had against injustice and oppression, and how sternly he could condemn what he considered detrimental to his country's welfare.

(8) Last, but by no means least, we must remember Cowper was a deeply and sincerely religious man. His religion may have taken at times a somewhat narrow and gloomy form, partly owing to its Calvinistic doctrines and partly from the melancholy arising from his mental disease, but it was undoubtedly thoroughly sincere, and was the source of a great deal of what was best in his character. It gave him courage to bear his sufferings bravely, and to keep up a cheerful appearance for the sake of others, even when full of despair within; it fostered his naturally gentle, sympathetic and affectionate nature; and it gave him the broader sympathy with humanity at large,



which was in his days producing the great English philanthropists of the eighteenth century.

#### 4. COWPER AS POET.

Cowper occupies a very definite place in the history of English poetry. He was the first to break away from the rigid artificiality of the classical school, and so was the pioneer of the romantic school of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott, the chief characteristics of which were its naturalness, simplicity and truth.

The classical school at its best was represented by Dryden and Pope. But a host of imitators of these great masters (who copied their faults but had no genius to reproduce their virtues) had, by Cowper's time, reduced English poetry to a dead level of monotony, dullness, conventionality, and stiff artificiality. Cowper was the first poet of that age to claim his freedom. His poetry is the natural and unaffected expression of himself. His great virtue as a poet is *truth*. He himself was above all things simple, natural, sincere, hating show and cant and humbug. He saw things truly, and he was content to say just what he saw, neither more nor less. His poetry, therefore, rings true. There is no trace of affectation or pretence in it, either in matter or style. Compare one of his nature descriptions with one of Pope's; the difference is that between the fresh scenes of the real country and the painted scenery of a theatre lit up with artificial lights. Pope in his study described what he thought he ought to see, borrowing his terms from dead classical authors; Cowper in the open air described just what he saw, in the simplest and truest language he could find. In this main characteristic—truth—he was akin to the great contemporary Scotch poet, Robert Burns, from whom, in all else, he differed so much. Both Cowper and Burns "would not prate of nature without knowing her; they would not pretend to passions of which they were unconscious; they would not take part in the tricked-out masquerades of their day."

Cowper, then, was first of all a reformer of poetry, who recalled it from conventionality to nature. And, secondly, he was the great poet of the religious revival of the 18th century. His aim as a poet was avowedly moral and religious (see Letters), and a large part of his poetry definitely expresses the attitude of mind of the evangelical and methodist schools towards the social abuses and sins of the time.

### 5. COWPER AS LETTER-WRITER.

Southey considered Cowper "the best of English letter-writers." The only names that can be mentioned as equal to his are those of Gray, Byron, Horace Walpole and Charles Lamb. But Walpole's and Gray's letters were obviously written for publication, and cannot compare with Cowper's for spontaneity and the charm of simplicity; Lamb had a style all his own; and Byron could not help posing.

(1) The first thing to note about Cowper's letters is that they are *real letters*. So many so-called letters of great men were either written for the press, or written with more than half an idea that some day they would be published. But Cowper never dreamt that the homely epistles to his friends, in which he chats and gossips so simply about every-day happenings and passing thoughts, would ever to be given to the world. He himself thought little of them (see Letter 4), and wrote absolutely without premeditation, just what happened to be in his mind at the moment (see Letter 11). As he wrote to his friend Unwin, his only method was just to "scribble away, and write his uppermost thoughts, and those only."

(2) Hence his letters are perfectly natural and sincere. There is no affectation or pose, or attempt at fine writing. They are just what real letters should be—friendly conversation, artlessly and naturally expressed on paper. For this reason they are an unconscious but faithful self-revelation. Without a trace of egotism, he writes about himself in such a way that we can learn best from his letters

what manner of man he was. He opens his heart unreservedly to his friends, and unaffectedly tells us through them of his doings, hopes and feelings.

(3) The letters are full of delicate humour and playful fancy. His rhyming letter to Newton (Letter 9) is very funny, and nearly every letter has something in it to make us smile. He excels in humorous descriptions—such as that of the waiter in the coffee-house (Letter 13); the visit of the parliamentary candidate (see Letter 20); the election riot (see Letter 21); the assembly of the Olney townsmen to discuss the peace of Versailles (see Letter 14). And he has many humorous touches, such as the beginning of Letter 32, the conclusion of Letter 45, etc. His playful fancy is very delightful in his description of life in the antediluvian times (Letter 25).

(4) Cowper had great skill in giving an interest to trivial incidents by his charming descriptions. His life, being so quiet and domesticated, presented few, if any, subjects of intrinsic importance to write about. But just as his greatest poem took its rise from so ordinary a piece of furniture as a "sofa," so, many of his letters owe their charm to some trifling occurrence in which few but he would have seen anything to write about. He makes a charming letter, for example, on the escape of one of his tame hares (Letter 6), and part of another on the behaviour of his gold-finches (see end of Letter 17). His love of nature, especially the well-ordered nature of gardens and cultivated land, comes out in his letters as well as in his poems. His letters have frequent references to his greenhouse and garden, and to the walks about Olney and Weston, as well as to the simple domestic joys of the winter fire-side.

5. Some of the most interesting letters are occupied with literary criticism. His defence of his favourite, Milton, against Dr. Johnson (Letter 3), and his comparison of Pope and Dryden (Letter 11), are good examples of his criticism of other authors; and Letters 22—25 give us

most interesting criticisms of his own poetry, and an insight into his method of work as a poet.

The literary style of Cowper's letters is so lucid and simple as to be deceptive. The reader thinks they are so easy to read that imitations of them should surely be as easy to write. Let him try, and he will find that this simple, clear, and easy style is the most difficult to master. It would, on this very account, be difficult to find a better model of style for the Indian student than Cowper's Letters. When he can write as perfect English as he will find here he will be able to congratulate himself on having mastered the English language in a way that few Englishmen ever have done.

A study of these Letters is a liberal education in English style, a revelation of the interest and pleasure which can be derived from the most monotonous life and commonplace surroundings, a bit of real intellectual enjoyment, and an introduction to a very charming and loveable personality.



## COWPER'S LETTERS.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, October 20, 1766.

MY DEAR COUSIN—I am very sorry for poor Charles's illness, and hope you will soon have cause to thank God for his complete recovery. We have an epidemical fever in this country likewise, which leaves behind it a continual sighing, almost to suffocation; not that I have seen any instance of it, for, blessed be God! our family have hitherto escaped it; but such was the account I heard of it this morning.

I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements—I mean what the world calls such—we have none; the place, indeed, swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner; but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the

pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection; and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you* that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her; and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all, for a heart to like it!

I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders, and I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularise, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it; indeed they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the meantime, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and I hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman.—Yours ever, my dear cousin, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Oct. 2, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND—You begin to count the remaining

days of the vacation, not with impatience, but through unwillingness to see the end of it. For the mind of man, at least of most men, is equally busy in anticipating the evil and the good. That word *anticipation* puts me in remembrance of the pamphlet of that name, which, if you purchased, I should be glad to borrow. I have seen only an extract from it in the Review, which made me laugh heartily, and wish to peruse the whole.

The newspaper informs me of the arrival of the Jamaica fleet. I hope it imports some pine-apple plants for me. I have a good frame and a good bed prepared to receive them. I send you annexed a fable, in which the pine-apple makes a figure, and shall be glad if you like the taste of it. Two pair of soles, with shrimps, which arrived last night, demand my acknowledgments. You have heard that when Arion performed upon the harp, the fish followed him. I really have no design to fiddle you out of more fish, but if you should esteem my verses worthy of such a price, though I shall never be so renowned as he was, I shall think myself equally indebted to the muse that helps me.

My affectionate respects attend Mrs. Hill. She has put Mr. Wright to the expense of building a new hot-house: the plants produced by the seeds she gave me, having grown so large as to require an apartment by themselves.—Yours,  
WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

October 31, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say, in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct, though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.

I have been well entertained with Johnson's biography, for which I thank you: with one exception, and that a



swinging one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican, and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvas. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him, and it is well for Milton that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing, and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon Lycidas, and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule (what is indeed ridiculous enough) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if Lycidas was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced, by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of the *Paradise Lost*? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute: variety without end, and never equalled, unless perhaps by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thrash his old jacket till I made his pension jingle in his pockets.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room. Our love attends yourself, Mrs. Unwin, and Miss Shuttleworth, not forgetting the two miniature pictures at your elbow.—Yours affectionately,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

February 27, 1780.

MY DEAR FRIEND—As you are pleased to desire my letters, I am the more pleased with writing them, though, at the same time, I must needs testify my surprise that you should think them worth receiving, as I seldom send one that I think favourably of myself. This is not to be understood as an imputation upon your taste or judgment, but as an encomium upon my own modesty and humility, which I desire you to remark well. It is a just observation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that though men of ordinary talents may be highly satisfied with their own productions, men of true genius never are. Whatever be their subject, they always seem to themselves to fall short of it, even when they seem to others most to excel. And for this reason,—because they have a certain sublime sense of perfection, which other men are strangers to, and which they themselves in their performances are not able to exemplify. Your servant, Sir Joshua! I little thought of seeing you when I began, but as you have popped in, you are welcome.

When I wrote last, I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses entitled the Modern Patriot, but was not quite pleased with a line or two which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and with the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well-deserved satire in the morning, in the evening becomes a libel; the author commences his own

judge, and while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers. Alas! what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet: I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking wit has produced the following, the subject of which is more important than the manner in which I have treated it seems to imply, but a fable may speak truth, and all truth is sterling; I only premise, that in the philosophical tract in the Register, I found it asserted that the glow-worm is the nightingale's proper food.

The officer of a regiment, part of which is quartered here, gave one of the soldiers leave to be drunk six weeks, in hopes of curing him by satiety. He *was* drunk six weeks, and is so still, as often as he can find an opportunity. One vice may swallow up another, but no coroner in the state of ethics ever brought in his verdict, when a vice died, that it was—*felo de se*.

Thanks for all you have done, and all you intend; the biography will be particularly welcome. My truly affectionate respects attend you all.—Yours, WM. COWPER.

When you feel postage a burden, send me some franks.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

May, 3, 1780.

DEAR SIR—You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment, that I have no excuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you, for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe that I am the only man alive, from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them

more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste; but my leaf gold is tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me, that you will read my letters. I am not fond of long-winded metaphors; I have always observed, that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so do mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by poets, and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise, and my praise put together, are fame enough for me. O! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antarctic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth,—what are the planets,—what is the sun itself but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, “The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!” Their eyes have never been opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute’s gardener

could take upon his back, and walk away with ; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself—"This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present ; I must leave it soon."

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

August 21, 1780.

THE following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table, when it ceased. In about five minutes, a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out, and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas ; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account. That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs ; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss ;—she ran right

through the town, and down the lane that leads to Drop-short; a little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaft's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturge's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tanpits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket, to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the words of Terence a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

May 1, 1781.

YOUR mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology; I might otherwise plead, that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as well as for myself, that I should let it alone; but all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest, are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must*. You have still however one comfort left, that what I must write, you may, or may not read, just as it shall please you; unless Lady Anne at your elbow should say, you *must* read it, and then like a true knight you will obey without looking out for a remedy.

I do not love to harp upon strings that, to say the least, are not so musical as one would wish. But you I know have many a time sacrificed your own feelings to those of others, and where an act of charity leads you, are not easily put out of your way. This consideration encourages me just to insinuate that your silence on the subject of a certain nomination is distressful to more than you would wish, in particular to the little boy whose clothes are outgrown and worn out; and to his mother, who is unwilling to furnish him with a new suit, having reason to suppose that the long blue petticoat would soon supersede it, if she should.

In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them: but the truth is, that they are most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two-thirds of the compilation will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand and five hundred lines; are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of *Table Talk—The Progress of Error—Truth—Expostulation*. Mr. Newton writes a Preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing), has been this; that till within these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine, to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks, whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an

ambiguity, that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come. I shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne, in your next frank. My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

May 23, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND—If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—"The poet is coming!"—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter.

This misfortune however comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important, where poetry is concerned! A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps, which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud of. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler, who will fancy himself a poet too, and what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a



difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted, when I reflect that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence; and yet not without your assistance. It will be quite necessary, that the correspondence between me and Johnson should be carried on without the expense of postage, because proof sheets would make double or treble letters, which expense, as in every instance it must occur twice, first when the packet is sent, and again when it is returned, would be rather inconvenient to me, who, as you perceive, am forced to live by my wits, and to him, who hopes to get a little matter no doubt by the same means. Half a dozen franks therefore to me, and *totidem* to him, will be singularly acceptable, if you can, without feeling it in any respect a trouble, procure them for me.

My neckcloths being all worn out, I intend to wear stocks, but not unless they are more fashionable than the former. In that case, I shall be obliged to you if you will buy me a handsome stock-buckle, for a very little money; for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a figure at Olney.

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, *that* is epigrammatic and witty in Latin, which would be perfectly insipid in English; and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult, and the most expensive part of the whole composition, and could not perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in

comparing the Jackdaw with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point which, though smart enough in the Latin, would, in English, have appeared as plain, and as blunt, as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster, when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all this drollery there is a mixture of rational, and even religious reflection at times: and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense; who is always entertaining, and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found even in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas, than by the neatness and purity of his verse; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again.

Since I began to write long poems, I seem to turn up my nose at the idea of a short one. I have lately entered upon one, which, if ever finished, cannot easily be comprised in much less than a thousand lines! But this must make part of a second publication, and be accompanied, in due time, by others not yet thought of: for it seems (which I did not know till the bookseller had occasion to

tell me so) that single pieces stand no chance, and that nothing less than a volume will go down. You yourself afford me a proof of the certainty of this intelligence, by sending me franks which nothing less than a volume can fill. I have accordingly sent you one, but am obliged to add, that had the wind been in any other point of the compass, or blowing as it does from the east, had it been less boisterous, you must have been contented with a much shorter letter, but the abridgement of every other occupation is very favourable to that of writing.

I am glad I did not expect to hear from you by this post, for the boy has lost the bag in which your letter must have been enclosed;—another reason for my prolixity!—Yours affectionately,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

July 12, 1781.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND—I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows, whether what I have got, be verse or not: by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme; but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before? The thought did occur, to me and to her, as Madam and I, did walk and not fly, over hills and dales, with spreading sails, before it was dark, to Weston Park.

I have writ Charity, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good; and if the Reviewer should say "to be sure, the gentleman's Muse, wears Methodist shoes; you may know by her pace, and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard, for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoidening play, of the modern day; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan, to catch if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production, on a new construction. She has

baited her trap in hopes to snap all that may come, with a sugar-plum."——His opinion in this, will not be amiss; 'tis what I intend, my principal end; and if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid, for all I have said, and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence, to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor, laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in, you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe or string, or any such thing; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I have penn'd; which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me— W. C.

P.S.—When I concluded, doubtless you did think me right as well you might, in saying what I said of Scott; and then it was true, but now it is due to him to note, that since I wrote, himself and he has visited we.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I return your preface, with many thanks for so affectionate an introduction to the public. I have observed nothing that in my judgment required alteration, except a single sentence in the first paragraph, which I have not obliterated, that you may restore it if you please, by obliterating my interlineation. My reason for proposing an amendment of it was, that your meaning did not strike me, which therefore I have endeavoured to

make more obvious. The rest is what I would wish it to be. You say, indeed, more in my commendation than I can modestly say of myself: but something will be allowed to the partiality of friendship, but on so interesting an occasion.

I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously: but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the Dunciad; but on being advised to read before he judge him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusting by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured.

I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been

writing, and at present I am not much in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore; and remember that if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne), has been warm in the praise of it.

*Retirement* grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning: now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen. It consists at present, I suppose, of between six and seven hundred; so that there are hopes of an end, and I dare say Johnson will give me time enough to finish it.

I nothing add but this—that *still I am*  
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Jan. 5, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND—Did I allow myself to plead the common excuse of idle correspondents, and esteem it a sufficient reason for not writing, that I have nothing to write about, I certainly should not write now. But I have so often found, on similar occasions, when a great penury of matter has seemed to threaten me with an utter impossibility of hatching a letter, that nothing is necessary but to put pen to paper, and go on, in order to conquer all difficulties,—that, availing myself of past experience, I now begin with a most assured persuasion, that sooner or later, one idea naturally suggesting another, I shall come to a most prosperous conclusion.

In the last Review, I mean in the last but one, I saw Johnson's critique upon Prior and Pope. I am bound to acquiesce in his opinion of the latter, because it has always been my own. I could never agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too) who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, but so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal. So far, therefore, I have no quarrel with Johnson. But I cannot subscribe to what he says of Prior. In the first place, though my memory may fail me, I do not recollect that he takes any notice of his Solomon: in my mind the best poem, whether we consider the subject of it, or the execution, that he ever wrote. In the next place, he condemns him for introducing Venus and Cupid into his love verses, and concludes it impossible his passion could be sincere, because when he would express it he has recourse to fables. But when Prior wrote, those deities were not so obsolete as now. His contemporary writers, and some that succeeded him, did not think them beneath their notice. Tibullus, in reality, disbelieved their existence as much as we do; yet Tibullus is allowed to be the prince of all poetical innamoratos, though he mentions them

in almost every page. There is a fashion in these things, which the Doctor seems to have forgotten. But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon Henry and Emma? I agree with him, that morally considered both the knight and his lady are bad characters, and that each exhibits an example which ought not to be followed. The man dissembles in a way that would have justified the woman had she renounced him; and the woman resolves to follow him at the expense of delicacy, propriety, and even modesty itself. But when the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects, and to have given it a consecrated place in their memories, without ever feeling it a burthen. I wonder almost, that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys and girls do not tear this husky, dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life, he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification.

The next packet I receive will bring me, I imagine, the last proof sheet of my volume, which will consist of about three hundred and fifty pages honestly printed. My public *entrée* therefore is not far distant.

Had we known that the last cheeses were naught, we would not have sent you these. Your mother has however enquired for and found a better dairy, which she means shall furnish you with cheese another year.—Yours, W. C.

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TO MRS. NEWTON.

Nov. 23, 1782.

MY DEAR MADAM—The soles with which you favoured us were remarkably fine. Accept our thanks for them; thanks likewise for the trouble you take in vending my poems, and still more for the interest you take in their success. My authorship is undoubtedly pleased when I hear that they are approved either by the great or the small; but to be approved by the great, as Horace observed many years ago, is fame indeed. Having met with encouragement, I consequently wish to write again; but wishes are a very small part of the qualifications necessary for such a purpose. Many a man who has succeeded tolerably well in his first attempt, has spoiled all by the second. But it just occurs to me that I told you so once before, and if my memory had served me with the intelligence a minute sooner, I would not have repeated the observation now.

The winter sets in with great severity. The rigour of the season, and the advanced price of grain, are very threatening to the poor. It is well with those that can feed upon a promise, and wrap themselves up warm in the robe of salvation. A good fireside and well-spread table are but very indifferent substitutes for these better accommodations; so very indifferent, that I would gladly exchange them both for the rags and the unsatisfied hunger of the poorest creature that looks forward with hope to a better world, and weeps tears of joy in the midst of penury and distress. What a world is this! How mysteriously governed, and, in appearance, left to itself. One man, having squandered thousands at a gaming-table, finds it convenient to travel; gives his estate to somebody to manage for him; amuses himself a few years in France and Italy; returns, perhaps, wiser than he went, having acquired knowledge which, but for his follies, he would never have acquired; again makes a splendid figure at home, shines in the senate, governs his country as its

minister, is admired for his abilities, and, if successful, adored, at least by a party. When he dies he is praised as a demi-god, and his monument records every thing but his vices. The exact contrast of such a picture is to be found in many cottages at Olney. I have no need to describe them; you know the characters I mean. They love God, they trust him, they pray to him in secret, and though he means to reward them openly, the day of recompense is delayed. In the mean time they suffer every thing that infirmity and poverty can inflict upon them. Who would suspect, that has not a spiritual eye to discern it, that the fine gentleman was one whom his Maker had in abhorrence, and the wretch last-mentioned, dear to him as the apple of his eye? It is no wonder that the world, who are not in the secret, find themselves obliged, some of them, to doubt a Providence, and others, absolutely to deny it, when almost all the real virtue there is in it, is to be found living and dying in a state of neglected obscurity, and all the vices of others cannot exclude them from the privilege of worship and honour! But behind the curtain the matter is explained; very little, however, to the satisfaction of the great.

If you ask me why I have written thus, and to you especially, to whom there was no need to write thus, I can only reply, that having a letter to write, and no news to communicate, I picked up the first subject I found, and pursued it as far as was convenient for my purpose.

Mr. Newton and I are of one mind on the subject of patriotism. Our dispute was no sooner begun than it ended. It would be well, perhaps, if, when two disputants begin to engage, their friends would hurry each into a separate chaise, and order them to opposite points of the compass. Let one travel twenty miles east; the other as many west; then let them write their opinions by the post. Much altercation and chafing of the spirit would be prevented; they would sooner come to a right understanding, and running away from each other, would carry on

the combat more judiciously, in exact proportion to the distance.

My love to that gentleman, if you please; and tell him, that, like him, though I love my country, I hate its follies and its sins, and had rather see it scourged in mercy, than judiciously hardened by prosperity.

Mrs. Unwin is not very well, but better than she has been. She adds her love to both.—Yours, my dear Madam, as ever,  
WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Dec. 7, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND—At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream; limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine!—yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the mean time, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to

be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathise with our friends who can.

The papers tell me that peace is at hand, and that it is at a great distance; that the siege of Gibraltar is abandoned, and that it is to be still continued. It is happy for me, that though I love my country, I have but little curiosity. There was a time when these contradictions would have distressed me, but I have learnt by experience that it is best for little people like myself to be patient, and to wait till time affords the intelligence which no speculations of theirs can ever furnish.

I thank you for a fine cod with oysters, and hope that ere long, I shall have to thank you for procuring me Elliott's medicines. Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my *Æsculapius* being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever. Adieu. My respects to Mrs. Hill.—Yours, faithfully,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Jan. 26, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND—It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber, the school-master, and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place—that the belligerent powers are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door. I saw this morning, at nine o'clock, a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose, upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed, very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their

breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind ; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. The powers of Europe have clashed with each other to a fine purpose ; that the Americans, at length declared independent, may keep themselves so, if they can ; and that what the parties, who have thought proper to dispute upon that point, have wrested from each other in the course of the conflict, may be, in the issue of it, restored to the proper owner. Nations may be guilty of a conduct that would render an individual infamous for ever ; and yet carry their heads high, talk of their glory, and despise their neighbours. Your opinions and mine, I mean our political ones, are not exactly of a piece, yet I cannot think otherwise upon this subject than I have always done. England, more, perhaps, through the fault of her generals, than her councils, has in some instances acted with a spirit of cruel animosity she was never chargeable with till now. But this is the worst that can be said. On the other hand, the Americans, who, if they had contented themselves with a struggle for lawful liberty, would have deserved applause, seem to me to have incurred the guilt of parricide, by renouncing their parent, by making her ruin their favourite object, and by associating themselves with her worst enemy, for the accomplishment of their purpose. France, and of course Spain, have acted a treacherous, a thievish part. They have stolen America from England, and whether they are able to possess themselves of that jewel or not hereafter, it was doubtless what they intended. Holland appears to me in a meaner light than any of them. They quarrelled with a friend for an enemy's sake. The French led them by the nose, and the English have thrashed them for suffering it. My views of the contest being, and having been always such, I have consequently brighter hopes for

England<sup>\*</sup> than her situation some time since seemed to justify. She is the only injured party. America may, perhaps, call her the aggressor; but if she were so, America has not only repelled the injury, but done a greater. As to the rest, if perfidy, treachery, avarice, and ambition, can prove their cause to have been a rotten one, those proofs are found upon them. I think, therefore, that whatever scourge may be prepared for England, on some future day, her ruin is not yet to be expected.

Acknowledge, now, that I am worthy of a place under the shed I described, and that I should make no small figure among the *quidnuncs* of Olney.

I wish the society you have formed may prosper. Your subjects will be of greater importance, and discussed with more sufficiency. The earth is a grain of sand, but the spiritual interests of man are commensurate with the heavens.

Pray remind Mr. Bull, who has too much genius to have a good memory, that he has an account to settle for Mrs. Unwin with her grocer, and give our love to him. Accept for yourself and Mrs. Newton your just share of the same commodity, with our united thanks for a very fine barrel of oysters. This, indeed, is rather commending the barrel than its contents. I should say, therefore, for a barrel of very fine oysters.—Yours, my dear friend, as ever,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL.

June 3, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND—My greenhouse, fronted with myrtles, and where I hear nothing but the pattering of a fine shower and the sound of distant thunder, wants only the fumes of your pipe to make it perfectly delightful. Tobacco was not known in the golden age. So much the worse for the golden age. This age of iron, or lead, would be insupportable without it; and therefore we may reasonably suppose that the happiness of those better days would

have been much improved by the use of it. We hope that you and your son are perfectly recovered. The season has been most unfavourable to animal life ; and I, who am merely animal, have suffered much by it.

Though I should be glad to write, I write little or nothing. The time for such fruit is not yet come ; but I expect it, and I wish for it. I want amusement ; and, deprived of that, have none to supply the place of it. I send you, however, according to my promise to send you everything, two stanzas composed at the request of Lady Austen. She wanted words to a tune she much admired, and I gave her these on Peace.—Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

June 8, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM—Our severest winter, commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption ; my attention is called upon by those very myrtles, by a double row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom ; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all, and devote this hour entirely to you.

You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport ; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one ; a man of letters and of genius ; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves,

and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect,—

*Nihil est ab omni*

*Parte beatum.*

I find that your friend Mr. Fytche has lost his cause, and more mortifying still, has lost it by a single voice. Had I been a peer, he should have been secure of mine; for I am persuaded that if conditional presentations were in fashion, and if every minister held his benefice, as the judges their office, upon the terms of *quamdiu bene se gesserit*, it would be better for the cause of religion, and more for the honour of the Establishment. There ought to be discipline somewhere; and if the Bishops will not exercise it, I do not see why lay patrons should have their hands tied. If I remember your state of the case, (and I never heard it stated but by you), my reflections upon it are pertinent. It is however long since we talked about it, and I may possibly misconceive it at present: if so, they go for nothing. I understand that he presented upon condition, that if the parson proved immoral or negligent, he should have liberty to call upon him either for his resignation or the penalty. If I am wrong, correct me.

On the other side I send you a something, a song if you please, composed last Thursday—the incident happened the day before.—Yours,

W. C.



TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

August 4, 1783.

MY DEAR WILLIAM—I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnson aside to make the enquiry you purpose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and so long as I have the opinion of a few capable judges in my favour, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing on scriptural subjects, were an unreasonable ambition even for a poet to entertain in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question therefore boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head and drop his chin; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet.

I am glad you were pleased with my Latin ode, and indeed with my English dirge, as much as I was myself. The tune laid me under a disadvantage, obliging me to write in Alexandrines; which I suppose would suit no ear but a French one; neither did I intend any thing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music. The ballad is a species of poetry, I believe, peculiar to this country, equally adapted to the drollest and the most tragical subjects. Simplicity and ease are its proper characteristics. Our forefathers excelled in it; but we moderns have lost the art. It is observed, that we have few good English odes. But to make amends, we have many excellent ballads, not inferior perhaps in true poetical merit to some of the very best odes that the Greek or Latin languages have to boast of. It is a sort of composition I was ever fond of, and if

graver matters had not called me another way, should have addicted myself to it more than to any other. I inherited a taste for it from my father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that way were produced. What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's, and Gay's, in the *What-do-ye-call-it*—" 'Twas when the seas were roaring ?" I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song. The success however answered to their wishes, and our puny days will never produce such another. The ballads that Bourne has translated, beautiful in themselves, are still more beautiful in his version of them, infinitely surpassing, in my judgment, all that Ovid or Tibullus have left behind them. They are quite as elegant, and far more touching and pathetic than the tenderest strokes of either.

So much for ballads and ballad writers. "A worthy subject," you will say, "for a man whose head might be filled with better things ;"—and *it is* filled with better things, but to so ill a purpose, that I thrust into it all manner of topics that may prove more amusing ; as for instance, I have two goldfinches, which in the summer occupy the greenhouse. A few days since, being employed in cleaning out their cages, I placed that which I had in hand upon the table, while the other hung against the wall : the windows and the doors stood wide open. I went to fill the fountain at the pump, and on my return was not a little surprised to find a goldfinch sitting on the top of the cage I had been cleaning, and singing to and kissing the goldfinch within. I approached him, and he discovered no fear ; still nearer, and he discovered none. I advanced my hand towards him, and he took no notice of it. I seized him, and supposed I had caught a new bird, but casting my eye upon the other cage perceived my mistake. Its inhabitant, during my absence, had contrived to find

an opening, where the wire had been a little bent, and made no other use of the escape it afforded him, than to salute his friend, and to converse with him more intimately than he had done before. I returned him to his proper mansion, but in vain. In less than a minute he had thrust his little person through the aperture again, and again perched upon his neighbour's cage, kissing him, as at the first, and singing, as if transported with the fortunate adventure. I could not but respect such friendship, as for the sake of its gratification, had twice declined an opportunity to be free, and, consenting to their union, resolved that for the future one cage should hold them both. I am glad of such incidents; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification of them serves to divert me.—Yours ever, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Nov. 30, 1783.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I have neither long visits to pay nor to receive, nor ladies to spend hours in telling me that which might be told in five minutes, yet often find myself obliged to be an economist of time, and to make the most of a short opportunity. Let our station be as retired as it may, there is no want of playthings and avocations, nor much need to seek them, in this world of ours. Business, or what presents itself to us, under that imposing character, will find us out, even in the stillest retreat, and plead its importance, however trivial in reality, as a just demand upon our attention. It is wonderful how by means of such real or seeming necessities, my time is stolen away. I have just time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone. I have wondered in former days at the patience of the Antediluvian world; that they could endure a life almost millenary, with so little variety as seems to have fallen to their share. It is probable that they had much fewer employments than we. Their affairs lay in a narrower compass; their libraries were indifferently furnished; philosophical researches were carried on with much less

industry and acuteness of penetration, and fiddles, perhaps, were not even invented. How then could seven or eight hundred years of life be supportable? I have asked this question formerly, and been at a loss to resolve it; but I think I can answer it now. I will suppose myself born a thousand years before Noah was born or thought of. I rise with the sun; I worship; I prepare my breakfast; I swallow a bucket of goat's milk, and a dozen good sizeable cakes. I fasten a new string to my bow, and my youngest boy, a lad of about thirty years of age, having played with my arrows till he has stript off all the feathers, I find myself obliged to repair them. The morning is thus spent in preparing for the chase, and it is become necessary that I should dine. I dig up my roots; I wash them; I boil them; I find them not done enough; I boil them again; my wife is angry; we dispute; we settle the point; but in the mean time the fire goes out, and must be kindled again. All this is very amusing. I hunt; I bring home the prey; with the skin of it I mend an old coat, or I make a new one. By this time the day is far spent; I feel myself fatigued, and retire to rest. Thus what with tilling the ground and eating the fruit of it, hunting and walking, and running, and mending old clothes, and sleeping and rising again, I can suppose an inhabitant of the primæval world so much occupied, as to sigh over the shortness of life, and to find at the end of many centuries, that they had all slipt through his fingers, and were passed away like a shadow. What wonder then that I, who live in a day of so much greater refinement, when there is so much more to be wanted, and wished, and to be enjoyed, should feel myself now and then pinched in point of opportunity, and at some loss for leisure to fill four sides of a sheet like this? Thus, however, it is, and if the ancient gentlemen to whom I have referred, and their complaints of the disproportion of time to the occasions they had for it, will not serve me as an excuse, I must even plead guilty, and confess that I am often in haste, when I have no good reason for being so.

This by way of introduction; now for my letter. Mr. Scott is desired by Mr. De Coetlegon to contribute to the Theological Review, of which, I suppose, that gentleman is a manager. He says he has insured your assistance, and at the same time desires mine, either in prose or verse. He did well to apply to you, because you can afford him substantial help; but as for me, had he known me better, he would never have suspected me for a theologian, either in rhyme or otherwise.

Lord Dartmouth's Mr. Wright spent near two hours with me this morning; a respectable old man, whom I always see with pleasure, both for his master's sake and for his own. I was glad to learn from him that his lordship has better health than he has enjoyed for some years.—Believe me, my dear friend, your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

March 21, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM—I thank you for the entertainment you have afforded me. I often wish for a library, often regret my folly in selling a good collection; but I have one in Essex. It is rather remote, indeed, too distant for occasional reference; but it serves the purpose of amusement, and a waggon being a very suitable vehicle for an author, I find myself commodiously supplied. Last night I made an end of reading Johnson's Prefaces; but the number of poets whom he has vouchsafed to chronicle being fifty-six, there must be many with whose history I am not yet acquainted. These, or some of these, if it suits you to give them a part of your chaise, when you come, will be heartily welcome. I am very much the biographer's humble admirer. His uncommon share of good sense, and his forcible expression, secure to him that tribute from all his readers. He has a penetrating insight into character, and a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think

for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgment. This remark, however, has his narrative for its object, rather than his critical performance. In the latter, I do not think him always just, when he departs from the general opinion. He finds no beauties in Milton's *Lycidas*. He pours contempt upon Prior, to such a degree, that were he really as undeserving of notice as he represents him, he ought no longer to be numbered among the poets. These, indeed, are the two capital instance in which he has offended me. There are others less important, which I have not room to enumerate, and in which I am less confident that he is wrong. What suggested to him the thought that the *Alma* was written in imitation of *Hudibras*, I cannot conceive. In former years, they were both favourites of mine, and I often read them ; but never saw in them the least resemblance to each other ; nor do I now, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure. After all, it is a melancholy observation, which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series of poetical lives, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed ! So much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral. What vanity, what petulance in Pope ! How painfully sensible of censure, and yet how restless in provocation ! To what mean artifices could Addison stoop, in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend ! Savage, how sordidly vicious, and the more condemned for the pains that are taken to palliate his vices. Offensive as they appear through a veil, how would they disgust without one. What a sycophant to the public taste was Dryden ; sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation. I know not but one might search these eight volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find

a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he.

I shall begin Beattie this evening, and propose to myself much satisfaction in reading him. In him, at least, I shall find a man whose faculties have now and then a glimpse from Heaven upon them;—a man, not indeed in possession of much evangelical light, but faithful to what he has, and never neglecting an opportunity to use it. How much more respectable such a character, than that of thousands who would call him blind, and yet have not the grace to practise half his virtues! He, too, is a poet, and wrote the *Minstrel*. The specimens which I have seen of it pleased me much. If you have the whole, I should be glad to read it. I may, perhaps, since you allow me the liberty, indulge myself here and there with a marginal annotation, but shall not use that allowance wantonly, so as to deface the volumes.

Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart well-cooked fashionable affair. A fashionable hat likewise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

March 29, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND—It being his majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its

calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchardside, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys halloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr. Grenville advancing toward me shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the drapier, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very



young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a ribband from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town however seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner, perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had ~~three~~ heads, I should not I suppose have been bound to produce them.

Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurts him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended: but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and teases away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton's affectionate and faithful

W. C.  
M. U.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

April 26, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND—We are truly sorry that you have been indisposed. It is well however to have passed through such a season and to have fared no worse. A cold and a sore throat are troublesome things, but in general an ague is more troublesome; and in this part of the world few have escaped one. I have lately been an invalid myself, and have just recovered from a rheumatic pain in my back, the most excruciating of the sort I ever felt. There was talk of bleeding and blistering, but I escaped with only an embrocation and a box of pills. Mr. Grindon attended me, who though he fidgets about the world as usual, is, I think, a dying man, having had some time since a stroke of apoplexy, and lately a paralytic one. His loss will be felt in this country. Though I do not think him absolutely an Æsculapius, I believe him to be as skilful as most of his fraternity in the neighbourhood, besides which, he has the merit of being extremely cautious, a very necessary quality in a practitioner upon the constitutions of others.

We are glad that your book runs. It will not indeed satisfy those whom nothing could satisfy but your accession to their party; but the liberal will say you do well, and it is in the opinion of such men only that you can feel yourself interested.

I have lately been employed in reading Beattie and Blair's Lectures. The latter I have not yet finished, I find the former the most agreeable of the two, indeed the most entertaining writer upon dry subjects that I ever met with. His imagination is highly poetical, his language easy and elegant, and his manner so familiar that we seem

to be conversing with an old friend, upon terms of the most sociable intercourse, while we read him. Blair is on the contrary rather stiff, not that his style is pedantic, but his air is formal. He is a sensible man, and understands his subjects, but too conscious that he is addressing the public, and too solicitous about his success, to indulge himself for a moment in that play of fancy which makes the other so agreeable. In Blair we find a scholar, in Beattie both a scholar and an amiable man; indeed so amiable, that I have wished for his acquaintance ever since I read his book. Having never in my life perused a page of Aristotle, I am glad to have had an opportunity of learning more than (I suppose) he would have taught me, from the writings of two modern critics. I felt myself too a little disposed to compliment my own acumen upon the occasion. For though the art of writing and composing was never much my study, I did not find that they had any great news to tell me. They have assisted me in putting my own observations into some method, but have not suggested many, of which I was not by some means or other previously apprised. In fact, critics did not originally beget authors; but authors made critics. Common sense dictated to writers the necessity of method, connection, and thoughts congruous to the nature of their subject; genius prompted them with embellishments, and then came the critics. Observing the good effects of an attention to these items, they enacted laws for the observance of them in time to come, and having drawn their rules for good writing from what was actually well written, boasted themselves the inventors of an art which yet the authors of the day had already exemplified. They are however useful in their way, giving us at one view a map of the boundaries which propriety sets to fancy; and serving as judges, to whom the public may at once appeal, when pestered with the vagaries of those who have had the hardness to transgress them.

The candidates for this county have set an example of economy, which other candidates would do well to follow,

having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform however which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity to hear what gentlemen could say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a Merry Andrew's jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption. Mr. Ashburner was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him, he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it; and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol.

Adieu, my dear friend; writing makes my back ache, and my paper is full.—We love you, and are yours,

W. AND M.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Oct. 20, 1784.

MY DEAR WILLIAM—Your letter has relieved me from some anxiety, and given me a good deal of positive pleasure. I have faith in your judgment, and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business; and the author

must know little of his own heart, who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production ; and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery, that he had written five thousand lines in vain ? The poem however which you have in hand will not of itself make a volume so large as the last, or as a bookseller would wish. I say this, because when I had sent Johnson five thousand verses, he applied for a thousand more. Two years since, I began a piece which grew to the length of two hundred, and there stopped. I have lately resumed it, and (I believe) shall finish it. But the subject is fruitful, and will not be comprised in a smaller compass than seven or eight hundred verses. It turns on the question, whether an education at school or at home be preferable, and I shall give the preference to the latter. I mean that it shall pursue the track of the former,—that is to say, that it shall visit Stock in its way to publication. My design also is to inscribe it to you. But you must see it first ; and if, after having seen it, you should have any objection, though it should be no bigger than the tittle of an *i*, I will deny myself that pleasure, and find no fault with your refusal. I have not been without thoughts of adding John Gilpin at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation : but in this article I am entirely under your judgment, and mean to be set down by it. All these together will make an octavo like the last. I should have told you, that the piece which now employs me, is in rhyme. I do not intend to write any more blank. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition. If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—

"Humph!"—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—"that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not."—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as of learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the Gentleman's Magazine, and may serve us, if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no further trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors, who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart.

I can easily see that you may have very reasonable objections to my dedicatory proposal. You are a clergyman, and I have banged your order. You are a child of *Alma Mater*, and I have banged her too. Lay yourself therefore under no constraints that I do not lay you under, but consider yourself as perfectly free.

With our best love to you all, I bid you heartily farewell. I am tired of this endless scribblement. Adieu!—  
Yours W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Nov. 1, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND—Were I to delay my answer, I must yet write without a frank at last, and may as well therefore write without one now, especially feeling, as I do, a desire to thank you for your friendly offices so well

performed. I am glad for your sake, as well as for my own, that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. I am willing too to consider Johnson's readiness to accept a second volume of mine, as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former; I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagination tells me, (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions), that your heart fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burthen when you came out again. You did well to mention it at the Thorntons; they will now know that you do not pretend to a share in my confidence, whatever be the value of it, greater than you actually possess. I wrote to Mr. Newton by the last post, to inform him that I was gone to the press again. He will be surprised, and perhaps not pleased: but I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least degree injured by his reserve; neither should I, were he to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work a secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me,—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion, that might still remain in it, that any man living is nearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an inviolable closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have had of the Task, they would have received from the public

papers. But you know now, that neither as poet, nor as man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense.

I am proceeding with my new work (which at present I feel myself much inclined to call by the name of *Tirocinium*) as fast as the Muse permits. It has reached the length of seven hundred lines, and will probably receive an addition of two or three hundred more. When you see Mr. Smith, perhaps you will not find it difficult to procure from him half a dozen franks, addressed to yourself, and dated the fifteenth of December, in which case, they will all go to the post filled with my lucubrations, on the evening of that day. I do not name an earlier, because I hate to be hurried; and Johnson cannot want it sooner than, thus managed, it will reach him.

I am not sorry that John Gilpin, though hitherto he has been nobody's child, is likely to be owned at last. Here and there I can give him a touch that I think will mend him, the language in some places not being quite so quaint and old-fashioned as it should be; and in one of the stanzas there is a false rhyme. When I have thus given the finishing stroke to his figure, I mean to grace him with two mottoes, a Greek and a Latin one, which, when the world shall see that I have only a little one of three words to the volume itself, and none to the books of which it consists, they will perhaps understand as a stricture upon that pompous display of literature, with which some authors take occasion to crowd their titles. Knox, in particular, who is a sensible man too, has not, I think, fewer than half a dozen to his *Essays*.—Adieu, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Nov. 27, 1784.

MY DEAR FRIEND—All the interest that you take in my new publication, and all the pleas that you urge in behalf of your right to my confidence, the moment I had read your letter, struck me as so many proofs of your regard;



of a friendship, in which distance and time make no abatement. But it is difficult to adjust opposite claims to the satisfaction of all parties. I have done my best, and must leave it to your candour to put a just interpretation upon all that has passed, and to give me credit for it, as a certain truth, that whatever seeming defects, in point of attention and attachment to you, my conduct on this occasion may have appeared to have been chargeable with, I am in reality as clear of all real ones as you would wish to find me.

I send you enclosed, in the first place, a copy of the advertisement to the reader, which accounts for my title, not otherwise easily accounted for ;—secondly, what is called an argument, or a summary of the contents of each book, more circumstantial and diffuse by far than that which I have sent to the press. It will give you a pretty accurate acquaintance with my matter, though the tenons and mortises, by which the several passages are connected, and let into each other, cannot be explained in a syllabus ;—and lastly, an extract, as you desired. The subject of it I am sure will please you ; and as I have admitted into my description no images but what are scriptural, and have aimed as exactly as I could at the plain and simple sublimity of the scripture language, I have hopes the manner of it may please you too. As far as the numbers and diction are concerned, it may serve pretty well for a sample of the whole. But the subjects being so various, no single passage can in all respects be a specimen of the book at large.

My principal purpose is to allure the reader, by character, by scenery, by imagery, and such poetical embellishment, to the reading of what may profit him. Subordinately to this, to combat that predilection in favour of a metropolis, that beggars and exhausts the country, by evacuating it of all its principal inhabitants : and collaterally, and as far as is consistent with this double intention, to have a stroke at vice, vanity, and folly, wherever I find them. I have not spared the Universities. A letter which appeared in the General Evening Post of Saturday, said to have been receiv-

ed by a general officer, and by him sent to the press, as worthy of public notice, and which has all the appearance of authenticity, would alone justify the severest censure of those bodies, if any such justification were wanted. By way of supplement to what I have written on this subject, I have added a poem, called *Tirocinium*, which is in rhyme. It treats of the scandalous relaxation of discipline that obtains in almost all schools universally, but especially in the largest, which are so negligent in the article of morals that boys are debauched in general the moment they are capable of being so. It recommends the office of tutor to the father, where there is no real impediment; the expedient of a domestic tutor, where there is; and the disposal of boys into the hands of a respectable country clergyman, who limits his attention to two, in all cases where they cannot be conveniently educated at home. Mr. Unwin happily affording me an instance in point, the poem is inscribed to him. You will now I hope command your hunger to be patient, and be satisfied with the luncheon that I send, till dinner comes. That piecemeal perusal of the work, sheet by sheet, would be so disadvantageous to the work itself, and therefore so uncomfortable to me, that, I dare say, you will waive your desire of it. A poem, thus disjointed, cannot possibly be fit for anybody's inspection but the author's.

Tully's rule—" *Nulla dies sine linea* "—will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another. But I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhymes, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with.

I am obliged to you, and to Mr. Bacon, for your kind remembrance of me when you meet. No artist can excel as he does, without the finest feelings; and every man that has the finest feelings is, and must be, amiable.—Adieu, my dear friend! Affectionately yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

April 30, 1785,

MY DEAR FRIEND—I return you thanks for a letter so warm with the intelligence of the celebrity of John Gilpin. I little thought, when I mounted him upon my Pegasis, that he would become so famous. I have learned also, from Mr. Newton, that he is equally renowned in Scotland, and that a lady there had undertaken to write a second part, on the subject of Mrs. Gilpin's return to London, but not succeeding in it as she wished, she dropped it. He tells me likewise, that the head master of St. Paul's School (who he is I know not) has conceived, in consequence of the entertainment that John has afforded him, a vehement desire to write to me. Let us hope he will alter his mind; for should we even exchange civilities upon occasion, Tiocinium will spoil all. The great estimation however in which this knight of the stone-bottles is held may turn out a circumstance propitious to the volume of which his history will make a part. Those events that prove the prelude to our greatest success, are often apparently trivial in themselves, and such as seemed to promise nothing. The disappointment that Horace mentions is reversed—We design a mug, and it proves a hogshhead. It is a little hard that I alone should be unfurnished with a printed copy of this facetious story. When you visit London next you must buy the most elegant impression of it, and bring it with you. I thank you also for writing to Johnson. I likewise wrote to him myself. Your letter and mine together have operated to admiration. There needs nothing more but that the effect be lasting, and the whole will soon be printed. We now draw towards the middle of the fifth book of the Task.

The man Johnson is like unto some vicious horses, that I have known. They would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred, they would kick.—So did he; his temper was somewhat disconcerted: but his pace was quickened, and I was contented.

I was very much pleased with the following sentence in Mr. Newton's last;—"I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication."—Now therefore we are friends again. Now he once more enquires after the work, which, till he had disburthened himself of this acknowledgment, neither he nor I, in any of our letters to each other, ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them, but both your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail,

Your mention Bensley. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like Bensley, (who was but a boy when I left London), boast of a connexion with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour; and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, I remember, in the life of one of our poets,—I believe of

Savage,—says, that he retired from the world, flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so; and that he who neglects the world will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate, a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again, and discovered a bird's nest with two tiny eggs in it. By and by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar to that of the parent bird. My nest is in a little nook. Here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectation.—Yours truly,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Sept. 24, 1785.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I am sorry that an excursion which you would otherwise have found so agreeable was attended with so great a drawback upon its pleasures as Miss Cunningham's illness must needs have been. Had she been able to bathe in the sea, it might have been of service to her; but I knew her weakness and delicacy of habit to be such as did not encourage any very sanguine hopes that the regimen would suit her. I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fireside, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself

born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I;—I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgment of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the "Harriet."

In my last, I wrote you word that Mr. Perry was given over by his friends, and pronounced a dead man by his physician. Just when I had reached the end of the foregoing paragraph, he came in. His errand hither was to bring two letters, which I enclose; one is to yourself, in which he will give you, I doubt not, such an account both of his body and mind, as will make all that I might say upon those subjects superfluous. The only consequences

of his illness seem to be, that he looks a little pale, and that though always a most excellent man, he is still more angelic than he was. Illness sanctified is better than health. But I know a man who has been a sufferer by a worse illness than his, almost these fourteen years, and who at present is only the worse for it.

Mr. Scott called upon us yesterday: he is much inclined to set up a Sunday school, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has had one some time at Clifton; and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure, that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners, in the lower class of mankind, can be brought to pass; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children; an assertion nowhere oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney; where children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well, indeed, if in some instances their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is, therefore, doubtless an act of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not, at least, that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose revenues need improvement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction,

Mrs. Unwin hopes that a hare, which she sent before Mrs. Newton went her journey, arrived safe. By this week's coach she also sent three fowls and a ham, with cabbages, of whose safe arrival she will likewise be glad to hear. She has long been troubled with a pain in her side, which we take to be of the spasmodic kind, but is otherwise well. She joins with me in love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, and to the young ladies; neither do we forget Sally Johnson.—Believe me, my dear friend, with true affection, yours,  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

October 12, 1785.

MY DEAR COUSIN—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure. But I will venture to say that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—“This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned.” You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you that neither years nor interrupted intercourse have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value; if that can be said to revive which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment. But I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment



that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction; and many other feats we have performed together upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelve-month I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply as to fear no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend Sir Thomas. I should remember him indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding, (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof that he could give of a judgment that never deceived him when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me; that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter; but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me during the far greater part of that time it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention and a care that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularise only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much. But to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth is much more, and in these post-diluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy for the most part are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which I suppose may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer, at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never, I believe, a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.—Yours, my dear friend and cousin.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, November 9, 1785.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post

will serve me—I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at my time, either while I was writing it or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste with which you both relish what you like, and, after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But, above all, I honour "John Gilpin," since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable.

My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted anything, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition; and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you therefore I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner soever you

please ; and add, moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own ; the worst consequence of this is that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as either life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best it would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time, by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy,—a token and proof of your affection.

In the affair of my next publication, toward which you also offer me so kindly your assistance, there will be no need that you should help me in the manner that you propose. It will be a large work, consisting, I should imagine, of six volumes at least. The twelfth of this month I shall have spent a year upon it, and it will cost me more than another. I do not love the booksellers well enough to make them a present of such a labour, but intend to publish by subscription. Your vote and interest, my dear

cousin, upon the occasion, if you please, but nothing more. I will trouble you with some papers of proposals when the time shall come, and am sure that you will circulate as many for me as you can. Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret. It is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprised of it but Mrs. Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the *Iliad*. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labour, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually anticipated by Pope, although in fact he has not anticipated me at all, I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say, a period which I do not conceive to be very near! I have not answered many things in your letter, nor can do it at present for want of room. I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done. There is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years. I am not indeed grown gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter. There was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me. Accordingly, having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth; which being worn with a small bag, and a black ribbon about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often.—Yours, my dearest cousin, W. C.

P. S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items,—that I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Feb. 9, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honey suckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my

making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made: but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him, whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be anything better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.—Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin,

W. C.

#### TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1786.

You must by no means, my dearest Coz, pursue the plan that has suggested itself to you on the supposed loss of your letter. In the first place I choose that my Sundays, like the Sundays of other people, shall be distinguished by something that shall make me look forward to them with agreeable expectation, and for that reason desire that they may always bring me a letter from you. In the next place, if I know when to *expect* a letter, I know likewise when to *enquire after* a letter if it happens not to come; a circumstance of some importance, considering how excessively careless they are at the Swan, where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their

destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival at Olney. It has happened frequently to me to receive a letter long after all the rest have been delivered, and the Padre assured me that Mr. Throckmorton has sent notes three several times to Mrs. Marriot, complaining of this neglect. For these reasons, my dear, thou must write still on Saturdays, and as often on other days as thou pleasest.

The screens came safe, and one of them is at this moment interposed between me and the fire, much to the comfort of my peepers. The other of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be made as servicable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones. The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Every thing is smart, every thing is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candlesticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements any thing should be left in the bottom of the



purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk pocket-handkerchiefs. There, my precious—I think I have charged thee with commissions in plenty.

You neither must nor shall deny us the pleasure of sending to you such small matters as we do. As to the partridges, you may recollect possibly, when I remind you of it, that I never eat them; they refuse to pass my stomach; and Mrs. Unwin rejoiced in receiving them only because she could pack them away to you—therefore never lay us under any embargoes of this kind, for I tell you beforehand, that we are both incorrigible. My beloved cousin, the first thing I open my eyes upon in a morning, is it not the bed in which you have laid me? Did you not, in our old dismal parlour at Olney, give me the tea on which I breakfast?—the chocolate that I drink at noon, and the table at which I dine?—the every thing, in short, that I possess in the shape of convenience, is it not all from you? and is it possible, think you, that we should either of us overlook an opportunity of making such a tiny acknowledgment of your kindness? Assure yourself that never, while my name is Giles Gingerbread, will I dishonour my glorious ancestry, and my illustrious appellation, by so unworthy a conduct. I love you at my heart, and so does Mrs. U., and we must say thank you, and send you a peppercorn when we can. So thank you, my dear, for the brawn and the chine, and for all the good things that you announce, and at present I will, for your sake, say no more of thanksgiving.

I have answered the Welshman's letter, and have a hope that I shall hear no more of him. He desired my advice, whether to publish or not. In answer, I congratulated him on the possession of a poetical talent, with which he might always amuse himself when fatigued with the weightier matters of the law. As to publication, I recommended it to him by all means, as the principal incentive to exertion. And with regard to his probability of success,

I told him that, as he had, I understood, already made the experiment by appearing in print, he could judge how that matter stood, better than I or any man could do it for him. What could I say, my dear? I was really unwilling to mortify a brother bard, and yet could not avoid it but at the expense of common honesty.

The Padre is to dine with us on Thursday next. I am highly pleased with him, and intend to make all possible advances to a nearer acquaintance. Why he is so silent in company I know not. Perhaps he is reserved, like some other people: or perhaps he holds it unsuitable to his function to be forward in mixed conversation. Certain it is, that he has enough to say when he and I are together. He has transcribed the ninth book for me, and is now transcribing the twelfth, which Mrs. Throckmorton left unfinished. Poor Teedon has dined with us once, and it did me good to stuff him.

We have heard from the poor widow, after whom you so kindly enquire. She answered a letter of Mrs. Unwin's about a week since. Her answer was affectionate, tender, and melancholy to a great degree, but not without expressions of hope and confidence in God. We understand that she has suffered much in her health, as well as in her mind. It could not be otherwise, for she was attached to her husband in the extreme. We have learned by a sidewind, since I mentioned her last, that Billy left every thing, or almost every thing, to the children. But she has at present one hundred pounds a year, and will have another hundred hereafter, if she outlives Mrs. U., being jointured in her estate. In the mean time, her sister lives with her, who has, I believe determined never to marry, from which circumstance she must doubtless derive advantage. She spent some time at Clapham, after her return from Winchester, is now with Mr. John Unwin at Croydon, and goes soon to her gloomy mansion, as she calls it, in Essex. We asked her hither, in hope that a little time spent at Weston might be of use to her, but her affairs would not suffer her to come. She is greatly to be pitied; and whe-

ther she will ever recover the stroke is, I think, very uncertain.

I had some time since a very clever letter from Henry C. which I answered as well as I could, but not in kind. I seem to myself immoderately stupid on epistolary occasions, and especially when I wish to shine. Such I seem now, and such to have been ever since I began. So much the worse for you. Pray, my dear, send me a bit of Indian glue, and an almanack.

It gives me true pleasure to learn that the General at least says he is better; but it would give me much more to hear others say the same. Thank your sister for her instructions concerning the lamp, which shall be exactly followed.—I am, my dearest, your most Gingerbread Giles, &c.,  
WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, Nov. 27, 1787.

It is the part of wisdom, my dearest cousin, to sit down contented under the demands of necessity, because they are such. I am sensible that you cannot in my uncle's present infirm state, and of which it is not possible to expect any considerable amendment, indulge either us, or yourself, with a journey to Weston. Yourself I say, both because I know it will give you pleasure to see *Cousidice mi* once more, especially in the comfortable abode where you have placed him, and because after so long an imprisonment in London, you who love the country and have a taste for it, would of course be glad to return to it. For my own part, to me it is ever new, and though I have now been an inhabitant of this village a twelvemonth, and have during the half of that time been at liberty to expatiate, and to make discoveries, I am daily finding out fresh scenes and walks, which you would never be satisfied with enjoying;—some of them are unapproachable by you either on foot or in your carriage. Had you twenty toes (whereas I suppose you have but ten) you could not reach them ;

and coach wheels have never been seen there since the flood. Before it indeed, (as Burnet says that the earth was then perfectly free from all inequalities in its surface), they might have been seen there every day. We have other walks both upon hill tops and in valleys beneath, some of which by the help of your carriage, and many of them without its help, would be always at your command.

On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows: "Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All-Saints, in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You would do me a great favour, Sir, if you would furnish me with one." To this I replied, "Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose."—"Alas! Sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him." I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons.

A few days since, I received a second very obliging letter from Mr. Mackenzie. He tells me that his own papers, which are by far, he is sorry to say it, the most numerous, are mark V. I. Z. Accordingly, my dear, I am happy to find that I am engaged in a correspondence with Mr. Viz, a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than any body.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about some-time with the spoon, and then returned it to her, saying, "I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it." Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.—Yours ever, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH,

The Lodge, Dec. 10, 1787.

I THANK you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one back. If at any time hereafter I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me.

Even as you suspect, my dear, so it proved. The ball was prepared for, the ball was held, and the ball passed, and we had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Throckmorton, knowing our trim, did not give us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why? as Sternhold says,—because, as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birth day—and so I told them—but not till it was all over.

Though I have thought proper never to take any notice of the arrival of my MSS. together with the *other good things* in the box, yet certain it is, that I received them. I

have furbished up the tenth book till it is as bright as silver, and am now occupied in bestowing the same labour upon the eleventh. The twelfth and thirteenth are in the hands of—, and the fourteenth and fifteenth are ready to succeed them. This notable job is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended.

The smith and the carpenter, my dear, are both in the room, hanging a bell; if I therefore make a thousand blunders, let the said intruders answer for them all.

I thank you, my dear, for your history of the G—s. What changes in that family! And how many thousand families have in the same time experienced changes as violent as theirs! The course of a rapid river is the justest of all emblems, to express the variableness of our scene below. Shakspeare says none ever bathed himself twice in the same stream, and it is equally true that the world upon which we close our eyes at night is never the same with that on which we open them in the morning.

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not always present Mrs. Unwin's love to you, partly for the same reason, deuce take the smith and the carpenter!—and partly because I forget it. But to present my own I forget never, for I always have to finish my letter, which I know not how to do, my dearest Coz, without telling you that I am ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Dec. 19, 1787 (in Post mark).

SATURDAY, my dearest cousin, was a day of receipts. In the morning I received a box filled with an abundant variety of stationery ware, containing, in particular, a quantity of paper sufficient, well covered with good writing, to immortalize any man. I have nothing to do, therefore, but to cover it as aforesaid, and my name will never die. In the evening I received a smaller box, but still more welcome on account of its contents. It contain-

ed an almanack in red morocco, a pencil of a new invention, called an everlasting pencil, and a noble purse, with a noble gift in it, called a bank-note for twenty-five pounds. I need use no arguments to assure you, my cousin, that by the help of ditto note, we shall be able to fadge very comfortably till Christmas is turned, without having the least occasion to draw upon you. By the post yesterday—that is, Sunday morning—I received also a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized; in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, “A Drop of Ink.” The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and *Anonymous* there may be some communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.

My toothache is in a great measure, that is to say, almost entirely removed; not by snipping my ears, as poor Lady Strange's ears were snipped, nor by any other surgical operation, except such as I could perform myself. The manner of it was as follows: we dined last Thursday at the Hall; I sat down to table, trembling lest the tooth, of which I told you in my last, should not only refuse its own office, but hinder all the rest. Accordingly, in less than five minutes, by a hideous dislocation of it, I found myself not only in great pain, but under an absolute prohibition not only to eat, but to speak another word. Great emergencies sometimes meet the most effectual remedies. I resolved, if it were possible, then and there to draw it. This I effected so dexterously by a sudden twitch, and afterwards so dexterously conveyed it into my pocket, that no creature present, not even Mrs. Unwin, who sat facing me, was sensible either of my distress, or of the manner of my deliverance from it. I am poorer by one tooth than I was, but richer by the unimpeded use of all the rest.

When I lived in the Temple, I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley and a younger

brother of the present Admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him, in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books, which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologized for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake; for at Dublin, it seems, he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revive, and wrote accordingly. I have now, therefore, a correspondent in Ireland, another in Scotland, and a third in Wales. All this would be very diverting, had I a little more time to spare to them.

My dog, my dear, is a spaniel. Till Miss Gunning begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and while he was their property had been accustomed to lie in the chimney corner, among the embers, till the hair was singed from his back, and till nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when nature shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country. He and my cat are excessively fond of each other, and play a thousand gambols together that it is impossible not to admire.

Know thou, that from this time forth, the post comes daily to Weston. This improvement is effected by an annual subscription of ten shillings. The Throcks invited us to the measure, and we have acceded to it. Their servant will manage this concern for us at the Olney post office, and the subscription is to pay a man for stumping three times a week from Olney to Newport Pagnol, and back again.

Returning from my walk to-day, while I was passing by some small closes at the back of the town, I heard the voices of some persons extremely merry at the top of the hill. Advancing into the large field behind our house, I



there met Mr. Throck, wife, and brother George. Combine in your imagination as large proportions as you can of earth and water intermingled so as to constitute what is commonly called mud, and you will have but an imperfect conception of the quantity that had attached itself to her petticoats: but she had half-boots, and laughed at her own figure. She told me that she had this morning transcribed sixteen pages of my Homer. I observed in reply, that to write so much, and to gather all that dirt, was no bad morning's work, considering the shortness of the days at this season.—Yours, my dear,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, March 3, 1788.

ONE day last week, Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk and returning homeward through the Wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the Wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him; a conclusion which I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their

first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitchfork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard; and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds;—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, “tear him to pieces”—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.—Yours,  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, July 28, 1788.

It is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on

the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description ; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved ; I mean the lime walk. By the help of the axe and the woodbill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it ; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste ; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear ! It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason.

Have you seen the account of five hundred celebrated authors now living ? I am one of them ; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanour of totally neglecting method ; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of my book of the Task, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connexion which poetry demands, for in poetry (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics ; the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the same time, to my honour be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the

histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them! Amen!

I join with you, my dearest coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill shall lose thee?—Ever thine,  
W. C.

TO MRS. KING.

Weston Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when I amused myself in a way somewhat similar to yours; allowing, I mean, for the difference between masculine and female operations. The scissors and the needle are your chief implements; mine were the chisel and the saw. In those days you might have been in some danger of too plentiful a return for your favours. Tables, such as they were, and joint-stools such as never were, might have travelled to Pertenhall in most inconvenient abundance. But I have long since discontinued this practice, and many others which I found it necessary to adopt, that I might escape the worst of all evils, both in itself and in its consequences—an idle life. Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which nature never designed me; though among them were some in which I arrived at considerable proficiency by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a 'squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself; and in the article of cabbage-nets, I had no superior. I even had

the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers: from them I proceeded to cucumbers; next to melons. I then purchased an orange-tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, caused me much ingenuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important consequences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a greenhouse, and accordingly built one; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do. When I left Olney for Weston, I could no longer have a greenhouse of my own; but in a neighbour's garden I find a better, of which the sole management is consigned to me.

I had need take care, when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set off be of some importance; for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have general-

ly filled my paper. But self is a subject inexhaustible, which is the reason that though I have said little, and nothing, I am afraid, worth your hearing, I have only room to add, that I am, my dear Madam, most truly yours,

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

Weston, Aug. 8, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Come when you will, or when you can, you cannot come at a wrong time, but we shall expect you on the day mentioned.

If you have any book that you think will make pleasant evening reading, bring it with you. I now read Mrs. Piozzi's Travels to the ladies after supper, and shall probably have finished them before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you. It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we who make books ourselves are more merciful to book-makers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write; there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the Dunciad should have written these lines,

The mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me.

Alas for Pope! if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! He was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition.

I scratch this between dinner and tea; a time when I cannot write much without disordering my noddle, and bringing a flush into my face. You will excuse me therefore if, through respect for the two important considerations of health and beauty, I conclude myself ever yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. BODHAM.

Weston, February 27, 1790.

MY DEAREST ROSE—Whom I thought withered and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing

could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her : I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and of course the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I had completed my sixth year ; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper ; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother, and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability, and a little I would hope both of his and of her——, I know not what to call it without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge, and that, breaking through

all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this: I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so. Neither do I at all forget my cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister; and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham, for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am, my dear, dear Rose, ever yours,  
W. C.

*P. S.*—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

*Still another P. S.*—I find, on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you and Mr. Bodham, but for two of



your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied. Your nephew tells me that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Weston, March 23, 1790.

YOUR MSS. arrived safe in New Norfolk Street, and I am much obliged to you for your labours. Were you now at Weston I could furnish you with employment for some weeks, and shall perhaps be equally able to do it in summer, for I have lost my best amanuensis in this place, Mr. George Throckmorton, who is gone to Bath.

You are a man to be envied, who have never read the *Odyssey*, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has insinuated to the contrary. His comparison of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the meridian and to the declining sun is pretty, but I am persuaded not just. The prettiness of it seduced him; he was otherwise too judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age; on the contrary, it seems to me a certainty that Homer, had he written the *Odyssey* in his youth, could not have written it better: and if the *Iliad* in his old age, that he would have written it just as well. A critic would tell me that instead of *written* I should have said *composed*. Very likely; but I am not writing to one of that snarling generation.

My boy, I long to see thee again. It has happened some way or other that Mrs. Unwin and I have conceived a great affection for thee. That I should is the less to be wondered at, because thou art a shred of my own mother; neither is the wonder great that she should fall into the same predicament: for she loves everything that I love.

You will observe that your own personal right to be beloved makes no part of the consideration. There is nothing that I touch with so much tenderness as the vanity of a young man, because I know how extremely susceptible he is of impressions that might hurt him in that particular part of his composition. If you should ever prove a coxcomb, from which character you stand just now at a greater distance than any young man I know, it shall never be said that I have made you one; no, you will gain nothing by me but the honour of being much valued by a poor poet, who can do you no good while he lives, and has nothing to leave you when he dies. If you can be contented to be dear to me on these conditions, so you shall; but other terms more advantageous than these, or more inviting, none have I to propose.

Farewell. Puzzle not yourself about a subject when you write to either of us; everything is subject enough from those we love.

W. C.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON.

The Lodge, May 10, 1790.

MY DEAR MRS. FROG—You have by this time (I presume) heard from the Doctor, whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin, (I do not mean a hedgehog, commonly called an urchin in old times, but a boy, commonly so called at present), expecting that he would find you at Buckland's, whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others with letters, or, at least, with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his despatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost, (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended), is the more probable, because he was never four miles from his home before, having only travelled at

the side of a plough-team; and when the Doctor gave him his direction to Buckland's, he asked, very naturally, if that place was in England. So what has become of him. Heaven knows!

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your Wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, namely, Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday, (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes—for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also), informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day-time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields I do not sally, like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found; but am a peaceable poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm, - the foxhunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike Bill is alive or dead; so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramuses surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you and Mr. Frog; that I long for your return, and that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best affections, ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, May 28, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ—I think thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least

wish me to wear it.—Adieu! ever thine—in Homer-hurry,  
W. C.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Weston, July 31, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter. If not, answer it without delay; and this injunction I give you, judging that it may not be entirely unnecessary; for though I have seen you but once, and only for two or three days, I have found out that you are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who in the course of my life have, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself.

We long to see you again, and are only concerned at the short stay you propose to make with us. If time should seem to you as short at Weston as it seems to us, your visit here will be gone "as a dream when one awaketh, or as a watch in the night."

It is a life of dreams; but the pleasantest one naturally wishes longest.

I shall find employment for you, having made already some part of the fair copy of the *Odyssey* a foul one. I am revising it for the last time, and spare nothing that I can mend. The *Iliad* is finished.

If you have Donne's poems, bring them with you, for I have not seen them many years, and should like to look them over.

You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood,—one a gardener's, the other a tailor's; terrible performers both!

W. C.

## TO MR. JOHNSON [PRINTER]

I DID not write the line that has been tampered with hastily, or without due attention to the construction of it; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver, they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook does a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope: but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods that have nothing but their only smoothness to recommend them!

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines which an ear so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration would undoubtedly condemn; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But, lest I tire you, I will only add that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling; assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it.

TO THE REV. MR. BUCHANAN.

Weston, May 11, 1791.

MY DEAR SIR—You have sent me a beautiful poem, wanting nothing but metre. I would to Heaven that you would give it that requisite yourself; for he who could make the sketch, cannot but be well qualified to finish it. But if you will not, I will; provided always, nevertheless, that God gives me ability, for it will require no common share to do justice to your conceptions.—I am much yours,  
W. C.

Your little messenger vanished before I could catch him.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, July 11, 1791.

MY DEAREST COZ—Your draft is safe in our possession, and will soon be out of it, that is to say, will soon be negotiated. Many thanks for that, and still more for your kindness in bidding me draw yet again, should I have occasion. None I hope will offer. I have a purse at Johnson's to which, if need should arise, I can recur at pleasure. The present is rather an expensive time with us, and will probably cause the consumption of some part of my loose cash in the hands of my bookseller.

I am not much better pleased with that dealer in authors than yourself. His first proposal, which was to pay me with my own money, or in other words to get my copy for nothing, not only dissatisfied but hurt me, implying, as I thought, the meanest opinion possible of my labours. For that for which an intelligent man will give nothing can be worth nothing. The consequence was that my spirits sank considerably below par, and have but just begun to recover themselves. His second offer, which is, to pay all expenses, and to give me a thousand pounds next midsummer, leaving the copyright still in my hands, is more liberal. With this offer I have closed, and Mr. Rose will to-morrow clench the bargain. Josephus understands that Johnson will gain two hundred pounds by it,

but I apprehend that he is mistaken, and that Mr. Rose is right, who estimates his gains at one. Mr. Hill's mistake, if he be mistaken, arises from his rating the expenses of the press at only five hundred pounds, whereas Johnson rates them at six. Be that as it may, I am contented. If he gains two I shall not grudge, and if he gains but one, considering all things, I think he will gain enough.

As to Sephus' scheme of signing the seven hundred copies in order to prevent a clandestine multiplication of them, at the same time that I feel the wisdom of it, I feel also an unsurmountable dislike of it. It would be calling Johnson a knave, and telling the public that I think him one. Now though I do not perhaps think so highly of his liberality as some people do, (and I was once myself disposed to think), yet I have no reason at present to charge him with dishonesty. I must even take my chance, as other poets do, and if I am wronged, must comfort myself with what somebody has said,—that authors are the natural prey of booksellers.

You judge right in supposing that I pity the King and Queen of France. I can truly say, that, except the late melancholy circumstances of our own, (when our sovereign had lost his senses, and his wife was almost worried out of hers), no royal distresses have ever moved me so much. And still I pity them, prisoners as they are now for life, and, since their late unsuccessful attempt, likely to be treated more scurvily than ever. Heaven help them, for in their case all other help seems vain.

The establishment of our guests at Weston is given up, not for any impediment thrown in the way by Mrs. Bodham, for she consented with the utmost disinterestedness to the measure, but because on surveying accurately the house in which they must have dwelt, it was found to be so near a ruin that it would have cost its value to make it habitable. They could only take it from year to year, for which reason the landlord would do nothing.

Many thanks for the Mediterranean hint, but unless

I were a better historian than I am, there would be no proportion between the theme and my ability. It seems indeed not so properly to be the subject for one poem as for a dozen.

I was pleased with Bouillie's letter, or, to say truth, rather by the principles by which it was dictated. The letter itself seems too much the language of passion, and can only be cleared of the charge of extravagance by the accomplishment of its denunciations,—an event, I apprehend, not much to be expected.

We are all well except poor Catharine, who yesterday consulted Dr. Kerr, and to-day is sick of his prescription. Our affectionate hearts all lay themselves at your petti-toes, and with Mrs. Unwin's best remembrances, I remain for my own peculiar, most entirely thine, WM. COWPER.

The Frogs are expected here on Wednesday.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

The Lodge, Dec. 21, 1791.

MY DEAR FRIEND—It grieves me, after having indulged a little hope that I might see you in the holidays, to be obliged to disappoint myself. The occasion, too, is such as will ensure me your sympathy.

On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs. Unwin at the fireside opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim, "Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!" I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended, too, with some other very, very alarming symptoms. At present, however, she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them, which will probably be, at the best, a consi-



derable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it! Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, upset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely.

W. C.

TO THE REV. MR. GREATHEAD.

Eartham, Aug. 6, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR—Having first thanked you for your affectionate and acceptable letter, I will proceed, as well as I can, to answer your equally affectionate request that I would send you early news of our arrival at Eartham. Here we are in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure grounds that I have ever seen, but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing.

It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and, when we arrived the first evening at Barnet, found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs. Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such a variety of noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently; and when we finished our next day's journey at Ripley, we were both in better condition, both of body and mind, than on the day preceding. At Ripley we found a quiet inn, that housed, as it happened, that night, no company but ourselves. There we slept well, and rose perfectly refreshed, and except some terrors that I felt at passing over the Sussex hills by moonlight, met with

little to complain of till we arrived about ten o'clock at Eartham. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell, and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive. Our host mentions you with great respect, and bids me tell you that he esteems you highly. Mrs. Unwin, who is, I think, in some points, already the better for her excursion, unites with mine her best compliments both to yourself and Mrs. Greathead. I have much to see and enjoy before I can be perfectly apprised of all the delights of Eartham, and will therefore now subscribe myself yours, my dear sir, with great sincerity, W. C.

TO MRS. COURTENAY, WESTON UNDERWOOD.

Eartham, Sept. 10, 1792.

MY DEAR CATHARINA—I am not so uncourteous a knight as to leave your last kind letter, and the last I hope that I shall receive for a long time to come, without an attempt, at least, to acknowledge and to send you something in the shape of an answer to it; but having been obliged to dose myself last night with laudanum, on account of a little nervous fever, to which I am always subject, and for which I find it the best remedy, I feel myself this morning particularly under the influence of Lethæan vapours, and, consequently in danger of being uncommonly stupid.

You could hardly have sent me intelligence that would have gratified me more than that of my two dear friends, Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, having departed from Paris two days before the terrible 10th of August. I have had many anxious thoughts on their account, and am truly happy to learn that they have sought a more peaceful region, while it was yet permitted them to do so. They will not, I trust, revisit those scenes of tumult and horror while they shall continue to merit that description. We are here all of one mind respecting the cause in which the Parisians are engaged; wish them a free people, and as

happy as they can wish themselves. But their conduct has not always pleased us. We are shocked at their sanguinary proceedings, and begin to fear, myself in particular, that they will prove themselves unworthy, because incapable of enjoying it, of the inestimable blessings of liberty. My daily toast is, Sobriety and Freedom to the French, for they seem as destitute of the former, as they are eager to secure the latter.

We still hold our purpose of leaving Eartham on the 17th, and again my fears on Mrs. Unwin's account begin to trouble me, but they are now not quite so reasonable as in the first instance. If she could bear the fatigue of travelling then, she is more equal to it at present, and supposing that nothing happens to alarm her, which is very probable, may be expected to reach Weston in much better condition than when she left it. Her improvement, however, is chiefly in her looks and in the articles of speaking and walking, for she can neither rise from her chair without help, nor walk without a support, nor read, nor use her needles. Give my love to the good Doctor, and make him acquainted with the state of his patient, since he, of all men, seems to have the best right to know it.

I am proud that you are pleased with the epitaph I sent you, and shall be still prouder to see it perpetuated by the chisel. It is all that I have done since here I came, and all that I have been able to do. I wished, indeed, to have requited Romney for his well-drawn copy of me, in rhyme, and have more than once or twice attempted it, but I find, like the man in the fable, who could leap only at Rhodes, that verse is almost impossible to me except at Weston. Tell my friend George that I am every day mindful of him, and always love him, and bid him by no means to vex himself about the tardiness of Andrews. Remember me affectionately to William and to Pitcairn, whom I shall hope to find with you at my return, and should you see Mr. Buchanan, to him also. I have now charged you with commissions enow, and hav-

ing added Mrs. Unwin's best compliments and told you that I long to see you again, will conclude myself, my dear Catharina, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS.

Weston, Feb. 23, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—My eyes, which have long been inflamed, will hardly serve me for Homer, and oblige me to make all my letters short. You have obliged me much by sending me so speedily the remainder of your notes. I have begun with them again, and find them, as before, very much to the purpose. More to the purpose they could not have been, had you been poetry professor already. I rejoice sincerely in the prospect you have of that office, which, whatever may be your own thoughts of the matter, I am sure you will fill with great sufficiency. Would that my interest and power to serve you were greater! One string to my bow I have, and one only, which shall not be idle for want of my exertions. I thank you likewise for your very entertaining notices and remarks in the natural way. The hurry in which I write would not suffer me to send you many in return, had I many to send, but only two or three present themselves.

Frogs will feed on worms. I saw a frog gathering into his gullet an earth-worm as long as himself; it cost him time and labour, but at last he succeeded.

Mrs. Unwin and I, crossing a brook, saw from the foot-bridge somewhat at the bottom of the water which had the appearance of a flower. Observing it attentively, we found that it consisted of a circular assemblage of minnows; their heads all met in a centre; and their tails diverging at equal distances, and being elevated above their heads, gave them the appearance of a flower half blown. One was longer than the rest; and as often as a straggler came in sight, he quitted his place to pursue him, and having driven him away, he returned to it again; no other minnow offering to take it in his absence. This we saw him do several times. The object that had

attached them all was a dead minnow, which they seemed to be devouring.

After a very rainy day, I saw on one of the flower borders what seemed a long hair, but it had a waving, twining motion. Considering more nearly, I found it alive, and endued with spontaneity, but could not discover at the ends of it either head or tail, or any distinction of parts. I carried it into the house, when the air of a warm room dried and killed it presently. W. C.

TO THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

W. U. July 15, 1793.

DEAR SIR—Within these few days I have received, by favour of Miss Knapps, your acceptable present of Chapman's translation of the *Iliad*. I know not whether the book be a rarity, but a curiosity it certainly is. I have as yet seen but little of it,—enough, however, to make me wonder that any man, with so little taste for Homer, or apprehension of his manner, should think it worth while to undertake the laborious task of translating him; the hope of pecuniary advantage may perhaps account for it. His information, I fear, was not much better than his verse, for I have consulted him in one passage of some difficulty, and find him giving a sense of his own not at all warranted by the words of Homer. Pope sometimes does this, and sometimes omits the difficult part entirely. I can boast of having done neither, though it has cost me infinite pains to exempt myself from the necessity.

I have seen a translation by Hobbes, which I prefer for its greater clumsiness. Many years have passed since I saw it, but it made me laugh immoderately. Poetry that is not good can only make amends for that deficiency by being ridiculous; and because the translation of Hobbes has at least this recommendation, I shall be obliged to you, should it happen to fall in your way, if you would be so kind as to procure it for me. The only edition of it I ever saw (and perhaps there never was another) was a very thick 12mo., both print and paper bad,

a sort of book that would be sought in vain, perhaps anywhere but on a stall.

When you saw Lady Hesketh, you saw the relation of mine with whom I have been more intimate, even from childhood, than any other. She has seen much of the world, understands it well, and, having great natural vivacity, is of course one of the most agreeable companions.

I have now arrived almost at the close of my labours on the Iliad, and have left nothing behind me, I believe, which I shall wish to alter on any future occasion. In about a fortnight or three weeks I shall begin to do the same for the Odyssey, and hope to be able to perform it while the Iliad is in printing. Then Milton will demand all my attention, and when I shall find opportunity either to revise your MSS. or to write a poem of my own, which I have in contemplation, I can hardly say. Certainly not till both these tasks are accomplished.—I remain, dear sir, with many thanks for your kind present, sincerely  
yours, W. C.

TO MRS. CHARLOTTE SMITH.

Weston, July 25, 1793.

MY DEAR MADAM—Many reasons concurred to make me impatient for the arrival of your most acceptable present, and among them was the fear lest you should perhaps suspect me of tardiness in acknowledging so great a favour,—a fear that, as often as it prevailed, distressed me exceedingly. At length I have received it, and my little bookseller assures me that he sent it the very day he got it; by some mistake, however, the waggon brought it instead of the coach, which occasioned a delay that I could ill afford.

It came this morning about an hour ago, consequently I have not had time to peruse the poem, though you may be sure I have found enough for the perusal of the Dedication. I have in fact given it three readings, and in each have found increasing pleasure.

I am a whimsical creature ; when I write for the public I write, of course, with a desire to please,—in other words to acquire fame, and I labour accordingly, but when I find that I have succeeded, feel myself alarmed, and ready to shrink from the acquisition.

This I have felt more than once, and when I saw my name at the head of your Dedication I felt it again ; but the consummate delicacy of your praise soon convinced me that I might spare my blushes, and that the demand was less upon my modesty than my gratitude. Of that be assured, dear Madam, and of the truest esteem and respect of your most obliged and affectionate, humble servant,  
W. C.

P.S.—I should have been much grieved to have let slip this opportunity of thanking you for your charming sonnets, and my two most agreeable old friends, Monimia and Orlando.

TO THE REV. MR. BUCHANAN.

Mundsley, September 5, 1795.

“——— to interpose a little ease,  
Let my frail thoughts dally with false sermise !”

I WILL forget for a moment that to whomsoever I may address myself, a letter from me can no otherwise be welcome than as a curiosity. To you, sir, I address this ; urged to it by extreme penury of employment, and the desire I feel to learn something of what is doing, and has been done, at Weston (my beloved Weston !) since I left it.

The coldness of these blasts, even in the hottest days, has been such that, added to the irritation of the salt spray with which they are always charged, they have occasioned me an inflammation in the eyelids, which threatened a few days since to confine me entirely ; but by absenting myself as much as possible from the beach, and guarding my face with an umbrella, that inconvenience is in some degree abated. My chamber commands

a very near view of the ocean, and the ships at high water approach the coast so closely that a man furnished with better eyes than mine might, I doubt not, discern the sailors from the window. No situation—at least when the weather is clear and bright—can be pleasanter; which you will easily credit when I add that it imparts something a little resembling pleasure even to me. Gratify me with news of Weston! If Mr. Gregson and your neighbours the Courtenays are there, mention me to them in such terms as you see good. Tell me if my poor birds are living! I never see the herbs I used to give them without a recollection of them, and sometimes am ready to gather them, forgetting that I am not at home. Pardon this intrusion.

Mrs. Unwin continues much as usual.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Mundsley, Oct. 13, 1798,

DEAR COUSIN—You describe delightful scenes, but you describe them to one who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them; who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect has been always famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of Nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress, will have no eyes to admire her in any.

In one day—in one minute, I should rather have said—she became an universal blank to me; and, though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself. In this country, if there are not mountains there are hills; if not broad and deep rivers, yet such as are sufficient to embellish a prospect; and an object still more magnificent than any river, the ocean itself, is almost immediately under the window. Why is scenery like this, I had almost said, why is the very scene which many years since I could not contemplate without



rapture, now become, at the best, an insipid wilderness? It neighbours nearly, and as nearly resembles, the scenery of Catfield; but with what different perceptions does it present me! The reason is obvious. My state of mind is a medium through which the beauties of Paradise itself could not be communicated with any effect but a painful one.

There is a wide interval between us, which it would be far easier for you than for me to pass. Yet I should in vain invite you. We shall meet no more. I know not what Mr. Johnson said of me in the long letter he addressed to you yesterday, but nothing, I am sure, that could make such an event seem probable.—I remain, as usual, dear cousin, yours,

W. C.

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## NOTES.

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### Letter 1.

TO MRS. COWPER.

*Huntingdon, Oct. 20, 1766.*

This letter was written soon after Cowper had become an inmate in the house of the Rev. William Unwin, and describes the methodical and religious daily life which he led as a member of that clergyman's family. It is interesting as describing the beginning of his lifelong friendship with Mrs. Unwin, and the sober, religious peace of mind which he enjoyed scarcely a year after his recovery from his second serious attack of insanity.

**Mrs. Cowper**—to whom the letter is addressed, was his cousin, Francis Maria Madan, the wife of another cousin, Major (afterwards General) Cowper. She was the sister of the Rev. Martin Madan, the Evangelical clergyman who tried to cure Cowper's madness by religious conversation. He was the author of an absurd book in favour of polygamy, called *Thelyphthora*, against which Cowper afterwards wrote a poem, called *Anti-Thelyphthora*. Mrs. Cowper was strongly Evangelical, and would doubtless sympathise with Cowper's intense religiousness at this period. All his letters to her are of a religious nature.

**Charles**—Mrs. Cowper's husband, Major (afterwards General) Cowper.

**You will soon have cause, etc.—i.e.** I hope he will soon completely recover from his illness, which (recovery) will cause you to thank God.

**Epidemical**—general, affecting a whole population ; from Greek *epi*, among, and *demos*, people. (An *endemic* disease is one affecting only a particular region ; local).

**Country**—region, locality.

**Leaves behind it a continual sighing**—i. e., one of the after effects of the illness is a constant sighing. (*To sigh* is to make a deep respiration, generally an expression of sorrow).

**Almost to suffocation**—extending almost to the point of suffocation.

**Not that**—it is not the case that, etc., (i. e., *although* I have not seen, etc.)

**Blessed be God**—i. e., I thank or bless God for the fact that our family, etc.

**Our family**—the Unwins, with whom Cowper was living.

**I am obliged to you**—I thank you.

**The world**—worldly people, as contrasted with religious people.

**The place**—Huntingdon.

**Swarms with them**—is full of them.

**Cards and dancing**—Cowper loved “fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,” and disapproved of card-playing, theatres and dancing, as did the Methodists and Evangelicals of his day. He often attacks card-playing in the *Task*: Cf. I. 472-77, and IV. 307-310.

**Gentle inhabitants**—people in good society, belonging to the class of *Gentlefolk*, *Gentlemen*. Cowper puts the word in italics to express his sarcasm at the pretended gentility of such people. (*Gentle*, *lit.* means “well-born,” “of good family,” from Latin *genus*, race : it gets its secondary meaning of mild, tender, from the refined manners supposed to belong to the well-trained and educated).

**To be accessories**—to be helpers ; to aid, or countenance.

**Murdering our time**—misspending, misusing, wasting our time.

**Methodists**—the name given in derision to the members of the Holy Club at Oxford, John and Charles Wesley and their friends, because of the strict *method* of their lives ; and afterwards to Wesley's converts in the great religious revival in the 18th century, led by him. The name was afterwards adopted by the Wesleyans, or followers of Wesley, themselves, and is now the title of the largest Protestant Church in the world—Methodism, or the Methodist Church. The early Methodists were very strict in their religion and denounced all such wordly amusements as Cowper refers to.

**The Scripture**—the Bible. (*Scripture* = written, and the Bible is so called as being to Christians the *written* record of the revelation of God's will given to inspired men of old).

**Faithful**—loyal to the truth.

**Holy mysteries**—sacred secrets (*viz.*, of the redemption of man by God as recorded in the Bible). A *mystery* is a secret, something hidden ; *mysterion*, the Greek word from which it is derived, meaning especially the secret rites and knowledge which only the initiated in the Greek religious societies could know. St. Paul, the great Christian apostle, uses the word, however, in the sense of a holy secret that has been revealed to all believers—a revealed secret ; and means by it the “ open secret ” of God's way of saving the world through the sacrificial death of Christ ; *cf. Bible, Colossians* 1. 26, 27.....“ the word of God, even the *mystery* which hath been hid from all ages and generations ; but now hath it been manifested to His saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

**Divine Service**—public worship in the Church.

**Read**—Cowper liked reading aloud, but does not seem to have done much private reading. He was most fond of

books of travel, but read little poetry, and did not care for philosophy or politics.

**Ride**—Cowper used to ride over to Cambridge to see his brother John once a fortnight.

**Work in the garden**—gardening was one of Cowper's favourite hobbies. He often refers to his garden and greenhouse in *The Task*, and in his letters. Writing to his friend Hill (May, 14.1767), he says: "Having commenced gardener, I study the arts of pruning, sowing and planting; and enterprize everything that way, from melons down to cabbages." This, like his other hobbies of carpentering, drawing, and keeping tame hares, was undertaken as a pleasant pursuit to occupy his mind so as to prevent a return of his distressing malady.

**We seldom sit, etc.**—*i. e.*, we generally go out into the garden very soon after dinner, and do not often rest in the house as long as an hour.

**Adjourn**—*i. e.*, break off our conversation in order to resume it in the garden. (*To adjourn* a meeting is to postpone it to finish its business on *another day*; from French *jour*, a day).

**Her son**—William Cawthorne Unwin: see *Introduction*, and Note to Letter 3.

**Hymns**—religious, sacred songs

**Martin's Collection**—a collection of hymns made by Cowper's cousin, the Rev. Martin Madan (See above).

**Harpsichord**—an old-fashioned stringed musical instrument, an improvement on the *spinnet*, and the predecessor of the piano. (*Harpsichord* is from the O. French *harpe*, a harp and *chorde*, a string).

**A tolerable concert**—a pretty good musical entertainment. (**Concert** = the agreement of several people in some plan, and so comes to mean a musical entertainment given by several singers and players working harmoniously together).

**Our hearts, etc.**—we sing the hymns, not only with our voices, but with sincerely religious feelings, *meaning* the words we sing.

**We sally forth**—we go out. (A *sally* is, literally, a rush of troops from a besieged place to attack the besiegers, from French, *saillir*, Latin *salire*, to leap; to *sally*—to make a sally).

**In good earnest**—with determination.

**When the days are short**—in Winter, when the sun sets early.

**Church-time and dinner**—church services are generally held about 10-30 a. m. or 11 a. m. in England; and middle-class families dine about 1 p. m.

**I need not tell you, etc.**—Mrs. Cowper, being a very religious woman herself, would understand that this daily round of religious observances, which to many people would seem wearisome, was quite consistent with happiness to him.

**Dwell together in unity, etc.**—an allusion to the Bible, *Psalms*, 133. 1., “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

**Meternal affection**—love as of a mother.

**A filial one**—love as of a son.

**Blessed to the God of our salvation**—*i. e.*, I thank or bless God, who saves us. (*Cf.* Bible, *Psalms*, 65.5., 79.9.)

**A heart**—a disposition, a nature.

**Taking orders**—becoming a clergyman, or minister of religion. (*Holy orders* = the clerical or ecclesiastical character conferred on a person by ordination or consecration to the ministry of the church; “to be in orders,” or “to be in holy orders,” therefore, means to be an ordained or consecrated clergyman).

**Every new convert, etc.**—*i. e.*, every person newly converted to religion thinks that God has called him to become a

clergyman. (*To convert* = *lit.* to turn round, change ; from Latin, *con*, together, and *verto*, to turn. So a *convert* is one who is *changed* from a worldly to a religious person, or from one religion to another. *Conversion* in religious language means that *change* of life begun when a person gives up his sinful habits and ways and *turns* to God).

**To particularise**—to describe in detail.

**To give me full**, etc.—to make it quite clear to me that I am doing right in refusing to become a clergyman.

**The dread of public exhibitions**—‘ my fear of exhibiting or showing myself in public.’ Cowper suffered from a morbid shyness, which sometimes amounted to panic in strange company. It was his strange fear of the examination he would have to undergo before the House of Lords that made him refuse the post of Clerk of the Journals, and which helped to bring on his attack of suicidal madness. Referring to that occasion he wrote : “ They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the situation, others can have none.” (*See Introduction*).

**Of turning many to the truth**—of converting many people to religious truth, *i. e.*, saving faith in Christ.

**Had I the zeal of Moses**, etc.—see Bible, *Exodus*, 4. 10–16. When God commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh of Egypt to deliver the people of Israel from slavery, Moses said ; “ Oh Lord, I am not eloquent.....for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” Then God said, “ Is there not Aaron thy brother the Levite ? I know that he can speak well.....And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people.” Moses was the great statesman and leader of the movement for the deliverance of Israel ; Aaron was its orator and preacher. Cowper means that he had little talent for preaching in public, so that even if he had great zeal for making converts to religion he would need some eloquent preacher to express his arguments and persuasions for him.

**Spokesman**—a *men* who *speaks* for others. (The word is curiously formed from *spoke* past tense of to *speak*, instead of from the infinitive, *speak*: the *s* is inserted for the sake of euphony; cf. *hunt-s-man*, *sport-s-man*, *kin-s-man* etc.).

**Yours ever**—short for, I remain, or am, yours (*i. e.*, your friend) ever (always).

## Letter 2. TO JOSEPH HILL ESQ.

Oct. 2. 1779.

This letter, and the following 43 down to the year 1786, were written from Olney. Nearly eleven years had passed since Cowper had written the letter just annotated, to Mrs. Cowper. After Mr. Unwin's death in 1767, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin removed to Olney, young Unwin becoming a clergyman in another part of the country. Five years after, in 1772, Cowper had another violent attack of insanity, and from 1772 to 1776 he wrote no letters, his first after that long silence being addressed to Joseph Hill, and dated Nov. 12. 1776.

**Joseph Hill**—was a schoolfellow of Cowper's at Westminster School. He became a successful lawyer, and was secretary to Lord Thurlow when the latter became Lord Chancellor. Cowper and Hill maintained a lifelong friendship, which was of great benefit to Cowper, who was no business man, because Hill, a man of sound sense and business ability, took charge of his finances for him. Cowper's letters to him are generally on business; but they are full of his brightness and playful humour.

**Count the remaining days of the vacation, etc.—i. e.**, 'the vacation is nearly finished, and there are so few days of it left that you begin to count or reckon them up as precious things.'

**Not with impatience, etc.**—when we look forward to something pleasant, we impatiently "count the days" until



it comes, wishing the time would go more quickly : but when we anticipate something unpleasant, we grudgingly "count the days," wishing the time would go more slowly.

**Vacation**—the law vacation, when the courts were closed. Hill was a lawyer.

**Anticipating**—*lit.* "taking beforehand" (Latin *ante*, before, and *capio*, take) ; so (1) to do something before somebody else can do it ; *e. g.*, 'she anticipated him' ; (2) to realize beforehand, to foresee, to expect.

**Pamphlet of that name**—a political skit or satire, written by Richard Tickell, and entitled *Anticipation*, published in 1778.

**The Review**—*i. e.*, *The Monthly Review*, a paper, Whig in politics, started by Dr. Ralph Griffiths in 1749.

**Peruse**—read through, with attention. (From intensive prefix *per*, and *use* : *lit.* to use thoroughly).

**The Jamaica Fleet**—England at this time was at war with France, Spain, and the American Colonies ; and, to protect English trade against the French and Spanish fleets, it was necessary to convoy the merchant vessels in fleets under the protection of British men-of-war. Jamaica is the largest of the British West-Indian Islands. It was discovered by Columbus in 1494, and belonged to Spain until 1655, when, in the war with Spain during the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, it was captured for England by a fleet and expedition under Admiral Penn and General Venables. Cromwell encouraged colonisation, trade and industry in the island, and in the time of Cowper its English colonists did a large trade with England. It is now a Crown Colony.

**Pine-apple plants**—Cowper took to growing pine-apples in 1778. The pine-apple (*ananas sativa*, botanical name) is a tropical plant producing a large fruit which resembles in shape the cone of a pine tree ; called in Urdu *anannas*,

**A good frame**—a glass frame or small green-house ; because tropical plants require artificial heat and protection from cold in England.

**A good bed**—garden bed ; a plot of ground prepared with suitable soil for the plants.

**Annexed**—*i. e.*, attached to his letter.

**A fable**—his poem called *The Pine-Apple and the Bee*, in which a bee, trying in vain to get at a pine-apple in its glass-house, serves to illustrate man's vain desires for "joys forbidden." Cowper frequently enclosed poems in this way in his letters to his friends ; indeed, his early poems were not written for publication, but sent to any friend he happened to be writing to at the time they were composed.

**Makes a figure**—is a prominent character.

**Two pair of soles**—the sole is a kind of flat-fish, common in European waters, considered a delicacy as an eatable. The genus include about 40 species, the commonest of which is the *Solea vulgaris*. It gets its name, probably, from its shape, which is something like that of the sole of the foot. Cowper was very fond of fish, and often refers to it in his letters. He called himself "the most ichthyophagous (fish-eating) of Protestants."

**Shrimps**—the shrimp is an edible crustacean, found in great numbers in shallow water on the English coast ; zoological name, *Crangon vulgaris*. Shrimps are eaten as a savoury with bread-and-butter.

**Demand my acknowledgments**—*i. e.*, oblige me to acknowledge your gift and thank you for it.

**Arion**—a famous musician and poet of Lesbos who flourished in Corinth about 625. B. C. To illustrate his musical power, a legend was told about him that, when he was returning from Italy to his home in Lesbos by sea, and was in danger of being attacked and robbed by the sailors of the ship, he played so divinely that he not only charmed his

enemies but attracted a company of dolphins (large fishes) which followed the ship ; and when, at the end of his playing, he threw himself into the sea to escape the sailors, a dolphin took him on its back and carried him safely to land.

**I really have no design, etc.**—Cowper means that he does not send his poem to his friend, Hill, in order to get him to send him more fish ; still, if Hill thinks his poem so good as to deserve another present of fish, he will thank his poetic genius just as Arion must have thanked *his*.

**To fiddle you out of more fish**—*i. e.*, to induce you to give me more fish as a reward for my poetry. (*To fiddle* = to play the violin, as Arion played the harp ; a double reference to Arion's playing, which attracted the fishes, and to his poetry, which might draw more fishes for his friend).

**Such a price**—*viz.*, another present of soles and shrimps.

**So renowned as he was**—*viz.*, Arion.

**Equally indebted to the muse that helps me**—*i. e.*, I shall attribute a second present of fish to my poetical genius which thus helps me to obtain more fish. (*Equally i. e.*, as much as Arion did. *Muse* : goddess of poetry : so, poetical genius, or inspiration).

**My affectionate respects**—supply, *Give. Respects*, in the plural, = an expression of esteem or regard.

**Attend**—‘ may (*they*) attend, or wait upon, her ’ : *i. e.*, I send them to her.

**She has put, etc.**—Mr. George Wright was a friend of Cowper who had a country seat about four miles from Olney. Cowper had sent him, as a present, some of the seeds of greenhouse plants which Mr. Hill had given to him.

**Letter 3.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

*Oct. 31, 1779.*

**William Cawthorne Unwin**, to whom this letter is addressed, was the son of the Rev. Morley and Mrs. Unwin. (*See Introduction*). He made Cowper's acquaint-

ance at Huntingdon, and it was through him that Cowper came to know the Unwin family, with some members of which he was in the closest friendship to the end of his life. Speaking of Mrs. Unwin in Letter 1., as we have already seen, Cowper says "her son and I are brothers." Young Unwin was educated at Christ College, Cambridge, and was preparing for holy orders when he made the acquaintance of Cowper at Huntingdon. He became a clergyman not long after, and in time became rector of Stock in Essex. He was a genuine Christian and a man of some intellectual attainments. References to his early death of typhus fever at the age of forty-one, will be found in Letter 30, dated Dec. 24 1786 (p. 58). Cowper's friendship with him was warm and life-long, and many of his letters are addressed to him.

**Go for nothing**—count as worth nothing in Johnson's opinion.

**You have said nothing**—*i. e.*, 'you have not answered my letter.'

**The propriety of your conduct**—*i. e.*, 'your conduct in not answering a letter that said nothing, was quite correct.'

**I am a loser by it**—because he got no letter in answer.

**Entertained**—amused and interested.

**Johnson's biography**—Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, published 1779–1781. Unwin had sent Cowper some of the early volumes of this book.

**With one exception**—*viz.*, the life of Milton (see below).

**A swinging one**—*swinging* is generally written *swingeing*, from *swinge* = to beat soundly, chastise. *Swinge* is the causal form of to *swing* : cf. sit, set ; fall, fell.

*Swinging*, or *swingeing* = great, huge, large : Cf. "a swinging, or swingeing, blow."

**Acquitted himself**—behaved or conducted himself (*i. e.*, as author).

**Sufficiency**—*i. e.*, his work has been adequately done.

**To the last degree**—to the greatest extent : *i. e.*, extremely unmerciful.

**A pensioner**—Johnson was a pensioner of the Crown, receiving a pension from the Government of £ 300 a year in 1762 ; so he would have no sympathy with Milton who sided with the republican Parliament against the crown.

**The Doctor**—Dr. Johnson held a supreme position in Cowper's time as literary critic, and was a sort of despotic monarch in the world of English letters.

**His royal patron**—George III, who had given him his pension. Dr. Johnson had been much impressed with the graciousness of the king in a private interview granted him in the royal library in 1765. He was all his life a strict Tory and Royalist.

**His monarchical principles**—his belief in and support of the monarchical form of Government.

**Has belaboured**—*lit.* beaten : *i. e.*, adversely criticised.

**As a man**—*i. e.*, as regards Milton's character. (A few sentences below he deals with Johnson's criticism of Milton *as a poet*, *i. e.*, as regards his poetical genius).

**Churlishness**—the character and conduct of a *churl*, *i. e.*, a surly, sullen, rude, bad-tempered man. Dr. Johnson says in his *Life of Milton*, "What we know of Milton's character in domestic relations is, that he was severe and arbitrary."

**Rancorous**—very malignant and spiteful.

**The two colours, etc.**—*i. e.*, as an artist may cover his canvas (on which he paints a picture) with only two colours, so Johnson in describing Milton's character has made it appear to have only two characteristics, *viz.*, churlishness etc., and rancorous hatred, etc.

**Some sourness in his temper**—surliness of disposition.

**Charged**—accused.

**His biographer**—Dr. Johnson.

**Has plucked, etc.**—*i. e.*, ‘he has criticised severely some of Milton’s most beautiful poems.’ (The Muse, the goddess of poetry, was often depicted as a winged figure, symbolising the elevating and uplifting influence of poetry. *His Muse* = Milton’s poetic genius; and the “feathers from her wing” = the products of his poetic genius, *i. e.*, his poems. To trample these under foot, is an allegorical way of saying, to show contempt for by severe criticism).

**His great foot**—Johnson was a big, heavy man, and his criticisms were very severe.

**Lycidas**—the famous elegy by Milton on the death of his friend, King; one of Milton’s earlier poems, written in 1637.

**Taken occasion, etc.**—*i. e.*, taken the opportunity.

**Childish prattlement**—childish, foolish or meaningless talk. (To *prattle* = to talk as a little child does).

**Pastoral compositions**—*pastoral* means having to do with the life of a shepherd (Latin, *pastor*, a shepherd). “Pastoral Poetry” was the poetry, very common in the Elizabethan age, that depicted an ideal state of simplicity, in which men and women lived as shepherds and shepherdesses, tending their flocks in an imaginary Arcadia. (Arcadia was the name of a pastoral region in ancient Greece where life was simple and innocent.) There was much foolish artificiality in such poetry; but some of it was very beautiful and noble. Johnson says: “Its (*i. e.*, *Lycidas*) form is that of a pastoral, easy, familiar, and therefore disgusting... we know that they never drove afield and that they had no flocks to batten,” etc.

**The prototype and pattern**—the first example and model. Cowper means that Milton did not originate pastoral poetry: much of it was written in England long before his time. Therefore it was not fair of Johnson to attribute the faults of pastoral poetry to him.

**Liveliness of the description**—the life-likeness, vividness, of Milton's descriptions of Nature, etc., in his poem.

**The sweetness of the numbers**—the harmony and musical sound of the rhythm or metre. (Johnson says ; " the diction (of *Lycidas*) is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing ").

**The classical spirit of antiquity**—Milton was a great classical scholar, and he has many references to the mythologies of Greece and Rome.

**No ear for poetical numbers**—no power of appreciating metre or rhythm.

**Stopped by prejudice, etc.**—*i. e.*, Johnson's prejudice against Milton prevented him from appreciating the beauty of his poetical rhythm of verse. (*Against* is to be taken with *stopped*, not with " prejudice ").

**Music**—the harmonious sound of the rhythm or metre.

**Paradise Lost**—the great epic poem of Milton, written in 1667. Cowper greatly admired Milton's poetry.

**The Dorian flute**—there were three primitive styles in Greek music, called the Lydian (soft and voluptuous), Phrygian (gay), and Dorian (grave and solemn.)

**Virgil**—Publius Virgilius Maro, the great Roman poet who wrote the *Æneid*—born 70. B. C., died 19. A. D.

**Copious theme**—full or wide subject.

**Blank verse**—unrhymed poetry, written in Iambic Pentameter metre (*i. e.*, in lines of five poetic *feet*, or ten syllables, in length, each *foot*, being an Iambus, two syllables with the accent on the second). Rhymed Iambic Pentameter verse is often called " Heroic measure."

**To degenerate into declamation**—*i. e.*, cease to sound like poetry and become a mere rhetorical prose harangue.

**Oh ! I could thrash, etc.**—*i. e.*, I should like to give him a sound beating, till the money he gets as pension jingled

in his pockets. Dr. Johnson was granted a pension by the king, (see above), and Cowper implies that this influenced him against the republican Milton.

**Jingle**—an onomatopoeitic (imitation) word, representing the ringing sound of coins struck against each other.

**I have no room**—*i. e.*, I have finished my sheet of paper.

**Attends**—*i. e.*, I send (our love) to you.

**Miss Shuttleworth**—Unwin's sister-in-law.

**Two miniature pictures**—*i. e.*, Unwin's two children, who were small copies of their father. (*Miniature* = small, diminutive).

**At your elbow**—*i. e.*, beside you, near you.

**Letter 4.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

*Feb. 27. 1780.*

**William Unwin**—see Note on Letter 3., and *Introduction*.

**Testify to my surprise**—*i. e.*, express, prove, my surprise.

**Imputation upon**—accusation of.

**Encomium**—eulogy, statement in praise of.

**To remark well**—to notice or observe well.

**Just observation**—true, correct remark.

**Sir Joshua Reynolds**—the great English portrait painter (1723—1792). He was the first President of the Royal Academy, in 1769—1791, and published his *Discourses on Painting* in 1781. He was a member of the famous club to which Dr. Johnson, Garrick and Burke belonged.

**Talent...genius**—the word *genius* is used only of the highest and rarest intellectual power, while *talent* means ability of a more ordinary type. There are many men of talent in every art and profession, but very few men of genius.

**To fall short of it**—*i. e.*, 'to fail to realise their highest ideals in it.'



**Sublime sense of perfection, etc.**—*i. e.*, men of genius have such a high standard of excellence, such lofty ideals, that their highest achievements can never succeed in reaching them ; whereas other men, who cannot even imagine such standards and ideals, are satisfied when they reach their own lower standards.

**Your servant, Sir Joshua!**—*i. e.*, “ I am your servant,”—a polite form of greeting. Cowper playfully makes a salaam to Sir Joshua as if he had just unexpectedly come in to visit him.

**I little thought, etc.**—*i. e.*, Cowper did not mean to quote from Sir Joshua when he began his letter, but he was glad that his remark occurred to him as he wrote.

**Popped in**—visited me unexpectedly and informally.

**The Modern Patriot**—A satirical poem against the “ Opposition ” School, of which Burke was a prominent leader, which approved of the rebellion of the American Colonies, was opposed to the king (George III) and his ministers, and which was accused of encouraging lawless mobs in insulting the Court. Cowper wrote this poem in 1780 in reference to some of Burke’s proposals for political reform. He says he burnt the verses, but a poem with the same title is to be found in his published works, and is probably the same. (Cowper uses the term “ Patriot,” in reference to the “ Patriots,” the political party led by Pitt during Walpole’s administration (1721—1742), who opposed political corruption and court influence in the name of honesty and liberty).

The poem is as follows :

“ Rebellion is my theme all day,  
I only wish ’twould come  
(As who knows but perhaps it may ?)  
A little nearer home.

You roaring boys, who rave and fight  
On t’other side the Atlantic,  
I always held them in the right,  
But most so when most frantic.

When lawless mobs insult the court,  
That man shall be my toast,  
If breaking windows be the sport,  
Who bravely breaks the most.

But oh ! for him my fancy calls  
The choicest flowers she bears,  
Who constitutionally pulls  
Your house about your ears.

Such civil broils are my delight,  
Though some folks can't endure them,  
Who say the mob are mad outright,  
But that a rope must cure them.

A rope ! I wish we patriots had  
Such strings for all who need 'em—  
What ! hang a man for going mad !  
Then farewell British freedom."

**Burke's Speech**—Edmund Burke (1729—97), the statesman and political philosopher. His public life began in 1765, when he became private secretary to Lord Rockingham, the leader of the old Whig party. In 1770 he published his *Thoughts on Present Discontents*, denouncing the undue influence of the Court party, or "king's friends," as they were called, on politics and government. His wise and statesman-like writings on the rebellion of the American Colonies are of permanent value to statesmen and politicians. His advocacy of relief for Catholics and Irish Trade cost him his seat in Parliament in 1780. In 1780 he brought forward his *Plan of Economical Reform*, designed to check extravagance and abolish sinecures in Government Departments. For his brilliant career as an orator, statesman and writer, consult any good History of England. He died in 1797.

**His proposals for a reformation**—see above note : *Plan of Economical Reform*.

**His cause**—reform, and the opposition party. (Cowper, in contrast to Burke, was conservative and anti-democratic ; an "old Whig").

**The subject of the day**—the matter that seems of most importance at the moment.

**Commences his own judge**—begins to exercise the functions of a judge himself.

**He has laid his leaf-gold, etc.**—(*leaf-gold* = gold-leaf, gilding: *touchwood* = decayed wood, wood that has rotted to powder (from *tache*, Old English = tinder). He means that, as one who tries to gild rotten wood loses all his labour, because the wood falls to pieces at his touch, so an author, who praises some cause or proposal one day, may find the next day he has lost all his labour, when he discovers that the cause he praised is a bad one.

**My wit**—‘my intelligence, mental talent, ability for wisdom.’

**Fugitive**—fleeting, temporary.

**Catches at the subject**—thinks of a subject to write about.

**Filling.....with smoke**—*i. e.*, he lays hold of something, thinking it solid, and finds it is nothing but smoke he has grasped. (So, when the author comes to write about the subject he has thought of, he finds it is not worth writing about).

**I must do with it, etc.**—*i. e.*, ‘as a man who keeps a little bird in a cage, lets it out to have a little fly now and then, so Cowper must give his playful humour free play sometimes, and not allow it always to be repressed by his bad health and mental depression.’

**My linnet**—the linnet is a small English song-bird, kept and tamed for its singing powers. Cowper was very fond of keeping tame pets.

**Whisk**—fly quickly and lightly.

**My whisking wit**—‘my wit or humour when released and free.’

**Sterling**—real, genuine, of full value. So we say, £ 20 sterling, *i. e.*, £ 20 in good English sovereigns. (*Sterling*, originally a noun, meant a pure coin of full weight; derived

from *Esterling*, (Easterling), the name given to the Hanse merchants (who came from the *East*, viz., Germany, to England), who were great money-dealers and noted for their genuine coinage.

The following—viz., his poem, *The Nightingale and the Glow-worm*. Its “subject” or moral is that “brother should not war with brother;” its manner is light and simple. The “fable” it relates is that when a nightingale, after singing all the evening, was about to eat up a glow-worm which it saw; the glow-worm expostulated, arguing that it was as useful in its own way as the nightingale in its:

“For ’twas the self-same Power divine,  
Taught you to sing and me to shine;  
That you with music, I with light,  
Might beautify and cheer the night.”

Whereupon the nightingale released him. The “truth” which Cowper makes this fable teach is unity and peace and toleration among religious people of different sects.

“Hence jarring sectaries may learn  
Their real interest to discern;  
That brother should not war with brother,  
And worry and devour each other;  
But sing and shine by sweet consent,  
Till life’s poor transient night is spent,  
Respecting in each other’s case  
The gifts of nature and of grace.”

**Philosophical**—writers of Cowper’s time used “philosophy” where we should say “science”; (e. g., “natural philosophy,” for natural science). So “philosophical” here means “scientific.”

**The Register**—The *Annual Register*, a summary of the history of each year, first issued in 1758.

**Glow-worm**—a luminous beetle, *lampyrus noctiluca*, the female of which emits phosphorescent light at night.

**Nightingale**—the most beautiful of English singing birds, so called because it sings at night (from A. S. *niht*, night, and *galen*, to sing).

**Quartered**—lodged, placed in quarters.

**By satiety**—by more than satisfying him with drink.

**May swallow up another**—*i. e.*, take the place of another and so stop it.

**Coroner**—a judicial officer whose duty it is to hold an inquest on, or examine, the bodies of any who die by accident, foul-play, or suicide, and pronounce a verdict as to the cause of death.

**In the state of ethics**—in the moral sphere.

**Felo de se**—suicide ; (*i. e.* one vice may drive out another ; but no vice can destroy itself by over-indulgence.)

**The biography**—Dr. Johnson's ; see above, beginning of the letter.

**Postage a burden...franks**—in Cowper's day, before the introduction of the penny post, the charge for postage was heavy, varying with the distance letters were sent, and was borne by the recipient, not the sender, of the letter. No envelopes were used, the large sheet on which the letter was written being folded together, and the address written on the outside, which was left blank. If two or more sheets were used, the charges for postage were doubled or trebled. **Franks** (*i. e.*, *free* letters : *frank* = free) were sheets signed on the back by Members of Parliament, who had the privilege of sending letters through the post free of charge. Cowper was able to get as many "franks" as he wanted from his aristocratic relations, which was a great help to a poor author who wrote many letters and had to send much manuscript to his publisher in London.

**Letter 5.**      **TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.**

*May. 3. 1780*

**John Newton**—The Rev. John Newton was curate of Olney when Cowper and Mrs. Unwin first settled there. He had visited them when they lived at Huntingdon, and es-

tablished a great influence over them by his strong character ; and it was largely to be under his spiritual care that they moved to Olney. John Newton was a noted leader of the Evangelical movement, and an able and strictly religious man ; but his influence on Cowper's sensitive and naturally melancholy mind was not healthy. He kept him and Mrs. Unwin in a round of religious exercises, which did much to accentuate Cowper's tendency to religious melancholia. He also rigidly cut him off from friendly intercourse with his "worldly" relatives, and for a time made him suffer from a mental isolation that was very bad for him (See *Introduction*). Even when Newton removed from Olney to the living of St. Mary Woolnoth, in London, in 1780, his influence over Cowper did not cease, as Cowper's letters to him show, for they give evidence of the restraint Cowper felt in his presence, or even in the thought of it. His letters to Newton are generally on religious topics, and shew little of the playfulness and humour characteristic of his letters to Lady Hesketh, Unwin and others.

Newton was born in 1726. Though brought up by religious parents, he was wild in his youth. After serving in the navy, he spent some years in the service of a slave-dealer on the African coast and suffered terrible privations. A narrow escape from shipwreck led to more serious thoughts, and eventually to his religious conversion. On his return to England he became a clergyman, and soon proved to be one of the most earnest and enthusiastic of the Evangelical School. He was a man of strong character, great courage, and earnest religious zeal, and in spite of his sombre theology and over-strictness of life, he was at bottom a man of a kind and sympathetic heart. He died in 1807.

**Latitude of excursion**—liberty to wander from the subject.

**This scribbling employment**—writing of letters.

**Swallowing such boluses**.....my gilding—a *bolus*

is a pill, and an unpleasantly tasting pill is sometimes *gilded*, or covered with gold-leaf, to disguise the taste. Cowper means that he is glad Newton is content to put up with the trifling subject matter of his letters for the sake of his pleasant style of composition.

**A palate like yours**—keeping up the metaphor of the pill, “a taste like yours.”

**My leaf gold is tarnished**—still keeping up the metaphor of the gilded pill, Cowper says even his literary style is affected by his religious depression.

**Tarnished**—soiled, dulled, (used of metals).

**Tinge**—colouring.

**Vapours**—melancholy, depression.

**Partiality**—affection, friendship.

**Long-winded metaphors**—metaphors long sustained, or drawn out; (referring to the comparison of his letters to gilded pills).

**They halt *etc.*—i.e.**, ‘if a metaphor is sustained too long, it begins to fail in its force.’ *Halt* = to limp like a lame man).

**So do mine—e.g.**, a gilded pill being tarnished by vapours, is a rather complicated metaphor.

**I deal much in ink—i.e.**, ‘I use much ink, but not so much for writing as for drawing.’ Early in this same year, Cowper began drawing, taking lessons from a local artist.

**My friend**—the religious man feels God to be, not merely his Creator and Judge, but his dearest Friend, Father and Saviour.

**Conservatory**—greenhouse : hot-house.

**Rich as a West Indian garden**—full of rare, tropical plants, like a garden in the West Indies.

**Consequence**—importance.

**Muse**—think, meditate.

**A frame of four lights**—a framework containing four panes of glass ; *i. e.*, a very small greenhouse.

**Pines**—pine-apples (See Notes, p. 100, on Letter 2).

**Lord Bute's gardener**—the Marquis of Bute had a seat at Luton, not far from Olney. He was Prime Minister under George III. in 1762. He is described by the historian, J. R. Green, as "a mere court favourite, with the abilities of a gentleman usher."

**A plaything lent me**—' a source of amusement lent to me by God.

**I must leave it**—*i. e.*, ' I must soon die, and go to a nobler occupation in heaven.'

**A harmless fluid**, etc.—*i. e.*, ' an artist cannot vitiate the taste or injure the morals of those who look at the harmless illusions in his pictures, as a writer may those of his readers by his writings.'

**Dab-chick**—a small water-bird that dives to catch fish. (*Dabchick*, or *dap-chick* = "the diving bird," *dap* being another form of *dip*).

**Feeding upon**—enjoying.

**My eyes drink**—*i. e.*, ' I gaze with keen pleasure upon.'

**Could think.....as I have done**—' could reflect, as I have, on his single state.'

**Unawakened**—In religious language, a sinner is said to be "asleep," and need to be "awakened" to his dangerous religious condition. (Biblical).

**From the Arctic**, etc.—*i. e.*, all over the world.

**To their advantage**—' because they are happier than I am, being able to enjoy trifles without knowing they are trifles.'

**Baubles**—toys, trifles.



**Vested in, etc.**—*i. e.*, the earth, etc. are only trifles if regarded as interesting in themselves, and not in their relation to God who made them.' **Rested in...***i. e.*, 'if we are satisfied with them.'

**Letter 6.**                      **TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.**

*Aug. 21. 1780.*

This letter is a good example of Cowper's powers of making of trivial incident interesting by his charming and humorous way of describing it.

**Newton**—see Notes to Letter 5.

**One of the hares**—Cowper was very fond of keeping pets, and his tame hares have become famous in literature. He had three, named Puss, Tiny and Bess. He built them houses to sleep in, and they were let out to play in the parlour in the evening, and in the hall in the daytime.

**Lattice-work**—trellis work; a screen made of crossed laths, or thin pieces of wood.

**Redoubtable**—formidable, brave, now used in a mock-heroic sense.

**Thomas Freeman**—the Olney ginger-bread maker.

**Richard Coleman**—Dick Coleman, as he was generally called, the son of a drunken cobbler at St. Alban's. Cowper had charitably taken charge of him when he left St. Alban's for Huntingdon.

**Nimbler**—more agile and active.

**Carrying less weight**—not being so stout and heavy as Thomas. (A racing term, race-horses being handicapped by being weighted with lead attached to their saddles).

**Hunt**—hunting party.

**The race, etc.**—*i. e.*, only he and Puss were left running.

**Dropshort**—a part of Olney.

**Got the start**—got in front.

**Pushed for**—ran towards.

**Tanyard**—a place where hides are *tanned*, or turned into leather.

**Harvest men**—labourers engaged in reaping the harvest.

**Tanpits**—pits full of water and lime, where the hides are soaked between layers of bark.

**Cost us four shillings**—paid, probably, to the men who rescued her for their trouble.

**Presuming upon**—counting on, reckoning on.

**Terence**—Publius Terentius Afer, the famous Roman comic dramatist, 195-159. B. C.

**Nihil mei**, etc.—*i. e.*, “Nothing that concerns me do you regard as indifferent to you.” This is a variation of the famous saying in Terence’s play! *Heauton Timoroumenos* (“The Self-Tormentor”), I. 1. 25., *viz.*, “Homo sum : humani nil a me alienum puto ;” “I am a man ; and nothing that concerns man do I consider a matter of indifference to me.”

## Letter 7. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

May 1, 1781.

This letter contains a reference to Cowper’s first appearance in public as an author in his volume of poems containing the *Progress of Error*, etc., which was published the following year, Mar. 1782.

**William Unwin**—see *Note*, Letter 3.

**Must admits of no apology**—*i. e.*, ‘when Mrs. Unwin says I *must* do a thing, it is no use trying to get out of it by excuses’ (*Must*, here, is a noun = ‘necessity,’ ‘obligation.’)

**Let it alone**—“it” = writing a letter.

**Over-ruled**—rejected, declared insufficient.

**Irrefragable**—‘that cannot be refuted.’ *Lit.* = ‘unbreakable.’ (Latin *re*, back, and *frangere* to break).

**Lady Anne**—a playful, pet name for Mrs. Unwin.

**Like a true knight**—one of the laws of chivalry by which a knight was bound by devotion and obedience to ladies.

**To harp upon strings.....not so musical, etc.**—*i. e.*, to mention again topics which are unpleasant. Talking of a subject is here compared to playing a harp, or other musical instrument. “To harp upon a subject,” is an idiomatic phrase for constantly dwelling on a subject till people are weary of it).

**I have sacrificed, etc.**—*i. e.*, I have often troubled you by asking you to help some friend or *protege* of mine.

**Where an act of charity, etc.**—*i. e.*, Unwin is such a kind-hearted man that for him to do a charitable thing will not mean altering his usual habits of life. The subject of “are not easily put out” is *you*, understood).

**Insinuate**—hint.

**A certain nomination**—*viz.*, to a vacancy in Christ’s Hospital, called also the Blue-Coat School from the dress of its scholars, one of the great London Schools, founded by Edward VI. in 1553. It was a charitable institution, where the sons of poor gentlemen were educated, and the nomination of a “governor,” or member of the Board of Trustees, was necessary to a boy wanting to gain admission. Cowper was evidently trying to get some poor boy into the school, and had asked Unwin to nominate him.

**To more than you would wish**—*i. e.*, to more people than you would like to distress, *viz.*, the boy, his mother, and Cowper himself.

**Long blue petticoat**—the boys of Christ’s Hospital wear a long, blue coat, yellow stockings, and no cap or hat.

**If she should**—*i. e.*, should permit him, etc.

**In the press** etc.—quoting, as it were, the formal advertisement of his coming book.

**In the press**—now being printed.

**Octavo**—the size of a volume having eight leaves to one sheet of paper : also written *8vo* ; from Latin *octavus*, eighth, from *octo*, eight. A book twice this size is called a *quarto* (Latin, *quartus*, fourth), being made up of sheets folded so as to make four leaves each ; and a *duodecimo* is smaller than *octavo*, as in it the sheets are folded so as to make twelve leaves each ; Latin, *duodecimus*, twelfth. The book referred to was his first published volume of poems, and was actually issued in March 1782.

**Of the Inner Temple**—see *Introduction* ; referring to his training as a lawyer.

**The produce of last winter**—i. e., written during last winter.

**Compilation**—collection (of poems).

**Sprung up**—was composed.

**Table Talk**, etc.—Besides these four poems, the volume contained *Hope*, *Charity*, *Conversation*, and *Retirement*, and some minor pieces.

**Writes**—i. e., ‘is writing,’ or ‘is to write.’

**Johnson is the publisher**—Joseph Johnson, whose shop was No. 72, St. Paul’s Churchyard, London, whom Mr. Newton introduced to Cowper as a publisher.

**I never mentioned to you**—It seems Unwin felt rather hurt at not having been taken into Cowper’s confidence in the matter.

**If that Mr. All-the-world**, etc.—i. e., ‘if the public whom I have just mentioned (“all the world”) should think my book worth knowing and reading.’ Cowper personifies the reading public in the manner of Bunyan, (*cf.*, the latter’s *Mr. Worldly-Wiseman*,” “*Mr. Facing-both-ways*,” etc.)

**Underwriters**—*i.e.*, insurance agents, generally of ships and ships' cargoes. (*Lit.* "Those who write their names under," or sign, documents, by which they accept the risk of insuring property). Cowper means that it was difficult to find any publisher who would take the risk of publishing the poems of an unknown poet.

**To a purse like mine**—'to one who, like myself, is a poor man.'

**Hazard**—risk.

**Even upon the credit of my own ingenuity**—*i. e.*, even with the support he might derive from confidence in his own ability.

**Subject himself to an ambiguity**—*i. e.*, put himself in a position to risk losing on the transaction. (*Ambiguity* = uncertainty, doubtfulness; from *ambi*, about, and *ago*, to go: Latin).

**Very expensive in case of a bad market**—*i.e.*, if the book did not sell well, the publisher would lose heavily and get no profit.

**Peradventures**—doubts, questionings.

**Peradventure**—'perhaps;' is properly an adverb, but here is a noun.

**The whole charge**—whole expense of publishing the book.

**So out I come**—*i.e.*, 'so my book is coming out, or about to be published.'

**Vincent Bourne**—Assistant-Master of Westminster School in Cowper's time. He published some volumes of Latin poems, some of which Cowper translated into English verse. See Letter 8.

**Your next frank**—*i. e.*, 'letter.' See note, p. 112, on Letter 4.

**My Muse, etc.**—*i. e.*, I will send you my volume of poems as soon as it is published. (*Muse*, here = the products of my poetic genius, *viz.*, his poems).

**Letter 8.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

May 23, 1781.

This letter continues the subject of the last, Cowper's first publication, and discusses his proposed translation of Vincent Bourne's Latin poems.

**William Unwin**—see Note to Letter 3. (p. 102).

**To see my muse in public**—'to see my poems published in print.'

**Mortification of**—disappointment due to.

**My trumpeter**—an announcement of his volume of poems, praising it and the author. (The trumpeter or herald used to proclaim the titles and deeds of prowess of the knights in the tournaments in old days. *Cf.* the phrase applied to people who praise themselves, "Your trumpeter must be dead!" That is, 'as you praise yourself, you must have lost the official whose business it was to praise you').

**Advertising blast**—an advertisement which would do the same work as the blast of the herald's trumpet.

**Man...is born to disappointment, etc.**—an allusion to a Biblical phrase: see Bible, *Job*. 5. 7., "But man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

**Preamble**—preface.

**Season of publication**—The best times for publishing books in England are early spring and early winter.

**Elapsed**—over: *lit.*, slipped away.

**The town.....the country**—*i. e.*, fashionable people were leaving London, as the London "Season" was over, and going to their country houses for the summer.

**The press**—the proofs of his book, sent from the press.

**Erratum**—the Latin word for mistake, error, always used of misprints.

**Knock out the brains, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'deprive the passage of sense, render it meaningless.'

**Presumptuous intermeddler**—some "reader" in the printer's office who dared to correct or alter what Cowper had written.

**He that employs him**—the author.

**Cobbling**—mending, as a shoemaker mends shoes.

**Tinkering**—mending, as a tinker mends kettles.

**Patching**—mending, as a tailor mends clothes.

**A shred**—adding to the poem a bit of his own composition, as a tailor sews a patch, or a bit of both, on to a garment.

**Impertinence**—'Impertinent' means (1) *lit.*, *not pertaining* to the subject, out of place, irrelevant; and so (2), impudent. Both meanings are included in *impertinence* here.

**Double or treble letters**—only one sheet of paper was allowed in ordinary postage, and higher rates had to be paid for every additional sheet. (See Note, p. 112, to Letter 4).

**Inconvenient to me**—too expensive for a poor man like me.

**To live by my wits**—*i.e.*, 'to get an income out of my writings.' Generally the phrase has a bad meaning, and = to get a living by deceit and sharp practice).

**To him, who, etc.**—*i. e.*, to my publisher, who hopes to make a profit from the book.' (There should be no comma after 'him,' as the relative, 'who,' is here restrictive).

**Franks**—see Note, p. 112, Letter 4. *To me*—governed by *acceptable*).

**Totidem**—so many, the same number; (Latin).

**Neckcloth...stocks**—the *neckcloth* was a white cloth or handkerchief tied round the neck; the *stock* was a kind of stiff collar, fastened by a buckle.

**Stock-buckle**—the metal clasp for fastening the stock. (This particular stock-buckle of Cowper's is still in existence at Olney).

**Make a figure**—present a good appearance; be noteworthy.

**Support**—help.

**Bourne**—see Note, p. 120, to Letter 7. Cowper published later a translation of 27 of Bourne's Latin poems into English verse.

**Epigrammatic**—terse, pithy, full of epigrams.

**Insipid**—‘tasteless’: dull, commonplace.

**The turn**—the witty point which gives piquancy to the whole.

**Expensive**—difficult; what *costs* the author most in effort and thought.

**Tolerable**—moderate, sufficient: (*lit.* endurable).

**The Jackdaw**—Cowper's translation of Bourne's poem called *Cornicula*.

**Sharpen a point**—emphasise and make more piquant.

**Tag of a lace**—end of a boot-lace.

**Vinny**—a familiar contraction of Vincent, Bourne's first name.

**Tibullus**—Albius Tibullus was a Roman elegiac poet, a friend of Horace,—from about 43. B. C. to 18. A. D.

**Propertius**—Sextus A. Propertius, another Roman elegiac poet of the same period—born B. C. 45, died 22. A. D.

**Avsonius**—Decius Magn. Avsonius, a Roman poet of the 4th cent., 304—395. A. D.

**In his way**—*i.e.*, Bourne's; which was that of a writer of light, elegant pieces.

**Ovid**—Publius Ovidius Naso, a famous Roman poet; born B. C. 43, and died in banishment in A. D. 18. His chief



work is the *Metamorphoses*, poems characterised by great elegance of style.

**A love of partiality**—*i.e.*, 'a love due to special personal considerations.'

**Usher**—assistant-master.

**Passed through it**—*i.e.*, studied in that form. (Classes in English schools are generally called "forms.")

**Sloven**—a careless, indolent, untidy person.

**Trusted to his genius**—*etc.*, 'he seemed to expect people to overlook his slovenliness for the sake of his genius.'

**Cloak**—excuse.

**In his person**—*i.e.*, personal appearance, dress, *etc.*

**Magpie**—a bird of the crow family, with a long tail, and white and black feathers.

**Exquisitely**—exactly, excellently.

**Drollery**—wit, fun, humour.

**A mixture, etc.**—*i.e.*, in his poems.

**Reflection**—thought.

**At nobody's expense**—*i.e.*, his humour is never sarcastic nor unkind.

**Classical.....classics** :—*Classic* (adj.) means, pertaining to the highest *class*, or rank ; hence a *classic* (*noun*) is a book or writing of the highest literary merit ; and *The Classics* are the literature of Greece and Roman, because for so long they were the standards of all European literature. *Classical* means in the style of the best Greek and Latin authors.

**The Duke of Richmond**—when a boy at Westminster School.

**Greasy locks**—oiled hair.

**Box his ears**—cuff or slap him on the head.

**Turn up my nose at**—despise.

**Entered upon**—begun.

**One, which, if ever finished**—his poem called *Hope*. It has 771 lines.

**But this must make part, etc.**—After all, this poem *Hope* was included in his first volume.

**Single pieces**—poems published separately.

**Stand no chance**—*i.e.*, of selling ; or being well received by the public.

**Go down**—be acceptable ; succeed : *lit.*, “be swallowed.”

**Franks**—see Note, p. 112, to Letter 4.

**Sent you one**—*viz.*, the present letter.

**Had the wind, etc.**,—Cowper several times refers to the bad effect the east wind had on him: *e.g.*, *To Lady Hesketh*, June 3, 1788 : “Then came an east wind, baneful to me at all times.” Cf. *The Task*, IV. 363—4 :—

“The unhealthful East,  
That breathes the spleen.”

In England the east wind is very cold and dry, because it comes from the Arctic steppes of Siberia and the north of Russia, and passes over only a narrow stretch of sea. The west wind is mild and wet, as it comes across the vast expanse of the Atlantic.

What Cowper means in this passage is, that when the east wind blows he cannot pursue any out-door occupation, and so he can find more time indoors for writing letters.

**Another reason for prolixity!**—*i.e.*, as he had had no letter from Unwin to read, he had more time for writing. *Prolixity* = diffuseness, wordiness in composition. (*Prolix*, Latin, from *pro*, forth, and *liqueo*, to flow.)

**Letter 9. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.**

*July 12, 1781.*

This letter is curious as being written in rhyme throughout. It could be written in lines, thus :

" My very dear Friend,  
 I am going to send  
 What, when you have read,  
 You may scratch your head,  
 And say, I suppose,  
 There's nobody knows  
 Whether what I have got  
 Be verse or not." *etc.*

Cowper calls these "hop o' my thumb" lines. Thackeray was fond of writing letters in this way.

**Newton**—see Note to Letter 5. (p. 112).

**What when you have read**—*viz.*, This letter, all in rhyme.

**You may scratch your head**—a sign of perplexity.

**By the tune and the time**—*i. e.*, judging by the rhyme and metre.

**Rhyme**—verse, poetry.

**Of yore**—of old; in the past. (*Yore* is akin to 'year,' being originally the genitive case of Anglo-Saxon *gear*, a year).

**Ditty**—little song.

**Her.....Madam**—Mrs. Unwin.

**With spreading sails**—'as if we had been ships sailing.'

**Weston Park**—near Olney; the seat of Mr. Throckmorton; see Letter 40.

**Charity**—the poem.

**Muse**—poetic inspiration, or genius.

**Wears Methodist shoes**—*i. e.*, 'is Methodist or Evangelical in its tone and spirit.'

**Her pace**—the style of the poem. (*Her* = the Muse's),

**(Her) talk about grace**—the discussion in the poem of the Evangelical doctrine of Divine grace, or saving mercy.

**Hoydening play**—rough, vulgar amusement. *Hoyden*, or *hoiden* (old Dutch *Heyden*, a heathen), meant a rough, country boor. Now used of a noisy, rough, ill-mannered girl.

**Assume a borrowed plume**—‘wear feathers or plumage not her own’; *i. e.*, adopts the humorous style of popular poetry.

**A tittering air**—a laughing manner. (*To titter* is an imitative word for half-suppressed laughter).

**On a new construction**—*i. e.*, with a new style of poetry, a mixture of humorous and grave subjects.

(Cowper here explains that his object as a poet was a moral and religious one, “to do good;” and that the light and humorous passages were simply intended to tempt those to read who would never look at a wholly serious work. For the same reason he tells us he arranged his poems in the volume with the lighter and more attractive first, and the more serious ones last: (See Letter to Newton, Oct. 10, 1784).)

**With a sugar-plum**—something pleasing and attractive. (Must be taken with “baited”).

**Run...after a rhyme**—*i. e.*, had to make an effort to find a rhyme to some word.’

**To the end of my sense**—*i. e.*, ‘some of the rhymes border on the nonsensical.’

**By hook or crook**—by some means or other : either rightfully or wrongfully. In the old days the poor of a manor (feudal estate) gathered wood for fuel in the manor forests, cutting the underwood with their *hook* (curved knife, sickle), and polling down dead branches with their *crook* (long stick with a curved end).

**A minuet pace**—at the pace, or in the step, of a *minuet*, a slow, graceful dance, so called from its short steps (Latin, *minutus*, to lessen).

**Swimming**—gliding: dancing with a slow, graceful motion.

**In a figure of eight**—*i.e.*, dancing in a course like this—8.  
**Without pipe or string**—*i.e.*, with no music to dance to.  
**Fit**—mood.

**What will make you dance**—*i.e.*, 'this jerky letter made up of jingling rhymes, will make Newton's brain dance, like the spring-floor makes people's legs dance.'

**Madam**—Mrs. Newton.

**Jigging**—dancing in a jerky manner.

**Scott**.—Cowper had written to Newton that Scott had not been to see him. He now informs him, that since he wrote, he had paid him a visit. Rev. Thomas Scott was curate of Weston Underwood, near Olney. He was a friend of Newton's, and later became curate of Olney. (See Letter 20, and Note).

**Himself and he**—The tautology is used in fun.

**Visited we**—Nominative used for objective in fun. (In the dialect of the county of Wiltshire, the nominative and objective cases are habitually used for each other; *e.g.*, a Wiltshire man would say,—“*Us* told him to come with *we*.”)

## **Letter 10. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.**

*The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.*

This letter refers to Newton's preface to his volume of poems; the proposal to send a copy to Dr. Johnson; and Newton's habit of smoking.

**Newton**—See Note to Letter 5. (p. 112).

**Your preface**—Newton wrote a preface to Cowper's volume; but, though it is dated Feb. 18., 1782, Johnson, the publisher, did not print it until the fifth edition in 1790, because he was afraid its very evangelical tone would render the book unpopular.

**Obliterated**—crossed out, made illegible.

**Interlineation**—the alteration of the passage, written between the lines.

**In the world—at all ; in the least.**

**Dr. Johnson**—Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great literary critic.

**Animadversions**—censures.

**Dr. Watts**—a Nonconformist clergyman (lived 1674 to 1748), famous as a writer of hymns.

**Niceties**—delicate distinctions (in the use of words and turn of phrases).

**Execution**—the way in which he expressed his “conceptions,” or thoughts.

**Pope**—the great English poet, born 1688, died 1744. He is best known for his *Essay on Criticism*, *Rape of the Lock*, *Essay on Man*, Translation of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the *Dunciad*. The *Dunciad*, (from the word *dunce*, an ignorant person), is a satire on various poets of his day.

**Somebody’s blockhead**—‘somebody’s stupid head’ ; i.e., the name of some stupid minor poet. **Blockhead** = ‘wooden head,’ and so a stupid, dull person.

**Whose name, etc.**—the name substituted for that of Watts, was *Banks*, that of an inferior minor poet. The lines originally ran ;—

“A Gothic library! of Greece and Rome . . .

Well purged, and worthy W—y, W—s (i.e., Watts),  
and Bl——.”

The latter line was altered to ;—

“Well purged, and worthy Settle, *Banks*, and Broome.”

**My doctrines**—religious beliefs. Johnson was High Church, Cowper Evangelical.

**This king of critics**—Dr. Samuel Johnson.

**Numbers**—metre.

**Trumpeters**—‘advertisers of my merits.’ See Note to Letter 8, (p. 121.)

**Sir Richard Blackmore**—a poet (1650—1729), who

wrote six long epic poems. He was made fun of for his long-windedness by Pope, in the *Dunciad* (II. 267—8.):—

“All hail him victor in both gifts of song,  
Who sings so loudly and who sings so long.”

His philosophical poem, called *Creation*, was published in 1712, and was praised by Johnson in his *Life*, and by Addison in the *Spectator*.

**Your pipe**—‘your habit of smoking tobacco.’ Cowper was an anti-tobacconist, and called tobacco, in his *Conversation*, a “pernicious weed.”

**It hardly falls**, etc.—‘it scarcely deserves the blame which I put on smoking in general.’

**Fumigate**—smoke (*transit.*). The two charges Cowper brought against smoking in his *Conversation* were, (1) it annoyed the ladies, (2) it encourages drinking. The lines referred to are :—

“Pernicious weed ! Whose scent the fair annoys,  
Unfriendly to society’s chief joys,  
Thy worst effect is banishing for hours,  
The sex whose presence civilizes ours ;  
\* \* \* \* \*  
They dare not wait the riotous abuse  
The thirst-creating steams at length produce,  
When wine has given indecent language birth,  
And forced the floodgates of licentious mirth.”

**It leads you**—when Newton wanted to smoke, he would go into his study or garden, so as not to annoy others.

**One poet**—Cowper himself.

**Hawkins Browne**—lived 1706—1760. The poem referred to is called *The Pipe of Tobacco*.

**Retirement**—another poem published in this volume.

**Time was when**—i.e., ‘there was a time when.’

**Johnson**—his publisher.

**Still I am—William**—Note the playful rhyme.

**Letter 11. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.***Jan. 5. 1782.*

This letter is interesting for its literary criticism on the poets Prior and Pope, and for its hint as to how Cowper wrote his letters.

**William Unwin**—see Note to Letter 3. (page 3).

**Penury of matter**—lack of subjects to write about.

**Hatching a letter**—composing, concocting a letter. (To *hatch* an egg is to bring it to maturity and to produce the chicken from it).

**To put the pen to paper, etc.**—This is an interesting proof that Cowper's letters were *real* letters—not carefully prepared with a view to publication, but unstudied and impromptu epistles.

**Most prosperous conclusion**—a good ending to the letter.

**Review**—probably *the Monthly Review*, a Whig magazine, started in 1749.

**Johnson's**—Dr. Johnson's.

**Critique**—critical article. (A French word, pronounced 'critèek').

**Prior**—Matthew Prior, English poet, who lived 1664—1721. Some of his poems are *Alma*, the *City Mouse* and the *Town Mouse*, *Solomon*, etc.

**Pope**—see Note to Letter 10. (page 129).

**Acquiesce in**—agree to.

**Dryden**—the great English poet of the Restoration, who lived 1631—1700. He led the way in the introduction of the classical style in English poetry, after the Elizabethan school had declined. He is celebrated as a satirist, his greatest satires being *Mac Flecknoe*, and *Absolem and Achitophel*. He also wrote many dramas.

**A mechanical maker of verses**—i.e., 'his poetry was made according to hard and fast rules of versification, not



created by poetic inspiration.' Pope used almost exclusively the "heroic metre" (rhymed iambic pentameter), and his lines are monotonous in their construction.

**Phlegmatic**—dull, sluggish.

**Of that class**—*viz.*, of mechanical verse-makers.

**Plodding Flemish painter**—The "Flemish School" of artists, (so called because they were mostly natives of Flanders), was noted for its careful and minute delineation of common objects. Vandyck (1599), and Hobbins (1611) were great artists of this school. (*Plodding*—painstaking, industrious).

**Shrimp**—see Note to Letter 2. (page 101).

**Drudgery**—monotonous, uninteresting toil.

**Dint of**—force of, power of.

**Laziness and carelessness**—*i.e.*, in composition. Dr. Johnson says of him:—"He was no lover of labour. What he thought sufficient, he did not stop to make better."

**His faults are numberless**—*Cf.* Dr. Johnson's opinion:—"His faults of negligence are beyond recital."

**Touching and retouching**—constant alteration and improvement of his verses.

**I have no quarrel with**—I agree with.

**Subscribe to**—agree with, (*Lit.* sign, "write under").

**His Solomon**—Prior's poem, called *Solomon on the Vanity of the World*, written in heroic metre and published 1718. It is in three books, called *Knowledge*, *Pleasure*, and *Power*.

**Venus and Cupid**—the classical goddess of Love, and her son, the little Love-god. (It was the fashion, especially with the Elizabethan poets, to introduce names and stories from Greek and Roman mythology, and Prior imitates them).

**Fables**—classical mythology.

**When Prior wrote**—In the days of Charles II., James II., William III., Queen Anne, and George I.

**Tibullus**—the Roman poet: see Note to Letter 8.

**Poetical inamoratos**—writers of love-poems. (*Inamorato*, (Italian), = a lover).

**A fashion**—*i. e.*, ‘the use of classical mythology is a well-known poetical device.’

**Fusty-rusty**—antiquated, out of date. (*Fusty* = mouldy, musty, smelling with age).

**Henry and Emma**—a poem by Prior, founded on an old 15th century ballad. Johnson calls it “a dull and tedious dialogue.”

**The knight and his lady**—Henry and Emma, the hero and heroine of the piece. Johnson says of them: “The example of Emma, who resolves to follow an outlawed murderer wherever fear and guilt shall drive him, deserves no imitation; and the experiment by which Henry tries his lady’s constancy is such as must end either in infamy to her, or in disappointment to himself.”

**Dissembles**—‘hides his real feelings by false pretences.’

**Delicacy**—the refined feeling of a lady.

**Propriety**—what is *proper* or correct according to the rules of etiquette.

**Modesty**—womanly chastity.

**That enchanting piece**—Prior’s poem.

**Bewitched them**—charmed, pleased them. (*Lit.* cast them under a witch’s spell, or magic).

**Romantic turn of it**—the poetical, imaginative character or spirit of it.

**A burthen**—(usual spelling *burden*): wearisome, irksome. Cf. *tedious*.

**As the Bacchanals served Orpheus**—*Bacchanals* (or Bacchantes, or Bacchæ) were females attendant’s of Bacchus, the god of wine. The legend goes that in Thrace they attacked Orpheus, the famous musician of Greek mythology, and

tore him to pieces, while they were celebrating with drunken madness the festival of Bacchus.

**Husky, dry**—prosaic, uninteresting; unimaginative. (A *husk* is the dry, hard sheath round a grain of corn, etc.).

**Their darling poet**—Prior.

**Erudition**—learning.

**Honestly printed**—*i.e.*, printed properly, each containing its full amount of printed matter.

**Public entre'e**—entrance, or introduction, to the public: coming, in his book, before the public as an author. (*Entre'e* = a French word, pronounced *ongtray*).

**Naught**—good for nothing.

## Letter 12.

TO MRS. NEWTON.

Nov. 23, 1782.

This letter is mainly occupied with a common religious problem, the prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the good.

**Mrs. Newton**—wife of the Rev. John Newton. See Note to Letter 5.

**Soles**—see Note to Letter 2.

**Favoured us**—*i.e.*, shewed favour to us by sending them as a present.

**Vending**—selling. Mrs. Newton was evidently pushing the sale of Cowper's first volume among her friends.

**My authorship**—*i.e.*, "I": "I, as an author." Cf. 'his lordship.'

**As Horace observed**—A reference to Horace's *Epistles* I. XVIII. 35. *Principibus placuisse viris nos ultima laus est*: "The highest praise is to be pleasing to the chief men."

**To write again**—publish another volume.

**Wishes are, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'in order to write poems, more is needed than the mere desire to do so.'

**Many a man**, etc.—*Cf.* such examples as Homer's *Odyssey*, which is inferior to his *Iliad*; Milton's *Paradise Regained*, after *Paradise Lost*; and the second parts of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

**Served me with the intelligence**—informed me.

**With great severity**—*i.e.*, the weather is very cold.

**Rigour**—severity: great cold.

**Feed upon a promise**—*i.e.*, 'comfort themselves for the lack of food, with God's promises of help and favour in the Bible.'

**The robe of salvation**—*i.e.*, 'comfort themselves for lack of warm clothing with trust in the saving power of Christ.' *Cf.* Bible, *Isaiah* 61. 10. ("God) hath clothed me with the garment of salvation."

**These better accommodations**—*i.e.*, the consolations of religion.

**Indifferent**—poor, inadequate.

**I would gladly**, etc.—a touching reference to Cowper's constant religious melancholy. It took the form of a terrible doubt that he would ever be saved.

**Tears of joy**—Extreme joy, like grief, sometimes expresses itself in weeping.

**How mysteriously governed**, etc.—*i.e.*, 'God governs the world according to laws that we do not understand, and sometimes seems not to be governing it at all.' *Cf.* Cowper's lines in his hymn:

"God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform."

**Squandered**—wasted.

**At a gaming-table**—*i.e.*, in gambling.

**Makes a splendid figure**—becomes a notable man.

**Shines in the Senate**—makes his mark in Parliament.

**Its minister**—as Prime Minister, or one of the great Secretaries of State.

**A party**—one of the great political parties—Whig or Tory ; his own party.

**A demi-god**—*lit.*, a 'half-god.' "Half divine."

**The exact contrast**—*Cf.* Cowper's description of the poor Olney lace-maker in his *Truth*, who "just earns a scanty pittance," but "knows her Bible true."

**They pray to him in secret**, etc.—a quotation from Christ's words in his "*Sermon on the Mount*: see Bible, *Matthew*, 6. 6.—"When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, *pray to thy Father which is in secret*, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall *recompense thee*:" (R. V.) (or, A. V., "*reward thee openly*.")

**A spiritual eye**—*i.e.*, 'spiritual vision, or insight into God's dealings with man.'

**Had in abhorrence**—abhorred : condemned because of his vicious life.

**Wretch**—poor creature. *Wretch* may be used (1) in a pitying sense, as here: or (2) as an expression of disgust or hate: *e.g.*, "vile wretch," "cruel wretch."

**The apple of his eye**—the pupil, centre, and most precious and tender part of the eye. A Biblical phrase for something (1) very precious, (2) that needs careful protection. *Cf.* Bible, *Psalms*. 17. 8. "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy (God's) wings."

**Doubt a providence**—'doubt the existence of a Divine Being who cares (*provides*) for His creature's wants.'

**All the real virtue**—all the really virtuous people.

**Behind the curtain**—in the next world: in the spiritual state. The other world is thought of as hidden from us in this life by a curtain or veil of obscurity. *Cf.* Tennyson's phrase, "Behind the veil."

**Very little, etc.**—*i.e.*, ‘the people counted great in this world will find their positions reversed in the next.’ Cf. Christ’s Parable, *Dives and Lazarus*, (Bible, Luke 16. 19, 31.)

**If you ask me, etc.**—another hint of the spontaneousness of Cowper’s letters.

**The subject of patriotism**—doubtless referring to the opposing political opinions of the time, Burke’s party *versus* the King’s party.

**Begin to engage**—*i.e.*, in argument.

**Chaise**—coach.

**Altercation**—dispute.

**Chafing of spirit**—vexation.

**Come to a right understanding**—come to an agreement.

**In exact proportion, etc.**—*i.e.*, ‘the further away they got from each other, the more wisely and justly would they argue.’

**That gentleman**—Newton.

**Scourged in mercy, etc.**—Cowper means that he would rather England should be punished by God for its sins, because the punishment might lead it to repentance, than that it should be made callous and unrepentant by prosperity.

**Letter 13.** To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Dec. 7, 1782.

This letter gives one delightfully humorous picture; and an interesting description of Cowper’s simple, domestic life, made all the more vivid by a reference to the turmoil of international politics outside.

**Joseph Hill**—see Note to Letter 2.

**Your box at the coffee-house**—the coffee-house was a great institution in the 18th century in England. It was what the modern club is to day. Politicians, authors, actors and wits use to meet in the evening at different coffee-houses for

political and literary discussions. Wills' coffee-house was the resort of politicians, Button's of wit's, Child's of clergymen etc.; others were Jonathan's, the Rainbow, Nando's, Dick's, Lloyd's, the Jerusalem, Don Saltero's, St. James, the British, Tom's etc. (*Box*=compartment, separated by low wooden partitions, in which several could eat and talk together.)

**The waiter, etc.**—a delightfully humorous picture.

**Limpid stream**—of clear tea.

**Its destination**—the cup.

**A roaring syllabub**—a bubbling, foaming mixture.

**A syllabub**=curdled milk mixed with wine. (The tea, made to foam by being poured from a height, *looks like a syllabub*).

**The nineteenth winter, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'it is nineteen years since I saw the waiter pour out your tea at the coffee-house in this way.'

**Complexion**—character.

**Ceaseless hum, etc.**—*i.e.*, the noisy talk of the men gathered in the coffee-house.

**Noisy and busy**—*i.e.*, talking and eating.

**Periwigs**—a wig (which is the abbreviation of periwig). From the old Dutch *peruyk*, a peruke. It was the fashion and the 18th century for gentlemen to wear powdered wigs instead of their own hair. The lawyer's wig is a survival of a once universal dress.

**Two rustics**—two country people: *viz.*, Mrs. Unwin, and Lady Austen.

**Your humble servant**—Cowper.

**One of the ladies**—Mrs. Unwin.

**Harpsichord**—see Note on Letter 1.

**The other**—Lady Austen.

**Battledore and shuttle-cock**—a popular game at that time. Badminton is a development of it. The *battledore* is a racket covered with stretched parchment; the *shuttlecock*, a cork with feathers stuck in it.

**To admiration**—Adverbial phrase = admirably.

**This entertainment over**—supply *being*.

**The papers, etc.**—‘the newspapers give most contradictory accounts.’ England was at this time at war with France and Spain and the American Colonies. The war actually ended a little over a month after this letter was written, the peace of Versailles, which contained the acknowledgement of the independence of the United States of America, being signed in Jan. 1783.

**Siege of Gibraltar**—The Spaniards and French began the siege of Gibraltar in 1779, and continued it for three years. It was defended by General Elliott very bravely, in the face of great odds. When he finally repulsed the last grand attack on Sept. 13. 1782, the siege was practically over, though it went on nominally till peace was signed the following year.

**Little curiosity**—Cowper did not take a very keen interest in political matters, though he occasionally refers to them.

**Little people**—persons of small importance.

**Speculations**—guesses.

**Cod**—a large sea-fish, much eaten, either fresh, salted, or dried. See Note to Letter 3.

**Oysters**—a bivalved edible mollusc, much prized as a dainty.

**Elliott’s medicines**—a doctor, whose drugs did Cowper’s eyes good.

**Uneasiness in either eye**—Cowper suffered even as a boy from his eyes, and they always were liable to inflammation. In 1766 he almost lost the sight of one of them.



**My Æsculapius**—*i. e.*, my physician ; *viz.*, the Elliott just mentioned. Æsculapius was the god of medicine in Greek mythology.

**Adieu**—Good-bye : farewell. (The French term for good-bye : = *lit.* “ to God,” a *Dieu* ; *i. e.* “ (I commend you) to God.”

**Letter 14.** TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Jan. 26, 1783.

An interesting letter, as it gives Cowper's views on a topic he does not often touch,—contemporary politics.

**John Newton**—See Note to Letter 5.

**The barber**—a man called Wilson.

**The Schoolmaster**—Teedon.

**Drummer**—one whose duty it is to beat the drum in the regimental land.

**Corps**—company of soldiers.

**Quartered**—stationed : provided with *quarters*, or dwelling-places.

**The belligerent powers**—*i. e.*, England, France, Spain, and the American Colonies. (*Belligerent* = warring, fighting).

**Articles**—points, items.

**Adjusted**—settled : the claim of each being satisfied. (The Treaty of Versailler was signed on Jan. 20. 1783).

**At the door**—almost here : practically settled.

**I saw, etc.**—A delightfully humorous and true description of rustic self-importance.

**A blacksmith's shed**—This shed stood opposite Cowper's house, in the Olney Market-place.

**Screened**—sheltered.

**Pacific turn of mind**—suitable to the declaration of the peace.

**Nothing transpired**—*i. e.*, ‘nothing of what they said reached my ears.’

**Clashed with each other**—come into collision: fought.

**To a fine purpose**—said ironically, meaning “with very small results.”

**Declared independent**—England had acknowledged the independence of America by the Treaty of Nov. 30, 1782. (“*that* the Americans...*that* what the parties,” is dependent on “purpose,” or *result* understood: ‘the result is *that*’ etc.).

**The parties**—the governments signing the Treaty: England, on one side, and France and Spain and Holland on the other. By the Treaty of Versailles many towns and regions that had been captured during the war were restored to their former owners.

**Nations, etc.**—Cowper points out, what has often been noticed, the different codes of morality applied to individuals and nations.

**Carry their heads high**—‘put on a proud bearing instead of hanging their head in shame.’

**Of a piece**—in agreement. (Newton favoured the American colonists more than Cowper).

**This subject**—the war with the colonies.

**A spirit of cruel animosity**—*viz.*, towards the colonists.

**A struggle for lawful liberty**—At first the colonists simply resisted the claim of the Home Government to tax them without their being represented in Parliament. Later the struggle for this “lawful liberty” (exemption from taxation), developed, mainly through the stupid obstinacy of George III., into a struggle for complete independence.

**Parricide**—the murder of a father: because the American Colonies were the “children” of England, their fatherland.

**Renouncing their parent**—*i.e.*, separating themselves from England.

**Her worst enemy**—France. The French began to send help to the Americans in 1777, and recognised the independence of the United States by treaty the following year.

**A treacherous, thievish part**—France and Spain took advantage of England's embarrassment with her colonies to try to ruin her trade and deprive her of many of her possessions.

**That jewel**—that precious possession.

**Holland.....in a meaner light**—*i. e.*, "Holland appears to me to have acted in a meaner manner." England declared war against Holland on Dec. 20, 1780, because of the discovery of a secret treaty between Holland and the Americans.

**With a friend for an enemy's sake**—*i. e.*, with England for the sake of France.

**Led them by the nose**—'deceived them into doing what they wanted.'

**Suffering**—allowing.

**The aggressor**—because it was the English Government's attempt to tax the Colonists that led to all the trouble.

**The rest**—the other European powers.

**Scourge**—Divine punishment.

**Quidnuncs**—political busybodies; people always curious to know the last news. (*Quidnunc* is Latin for *what now?*).

**The earth is a grain of sand**, etc.,—"The world and its affairs are very insignificant, but man's spiritual interest's are of eternal importance."

**Mr. Bull**—The Rev. William Bull, an Independent Minister at Newport Pagnell, five miles from Olney. See Note to Letters 15 and 16.

**An account**—a bill.

**The same commodity**—*viz.*, our love.

**Commending the barrel**, etc.,—Because in the first sentence *fine*, strictly, qualifies “barrel”; in the the second it qualifies “oysters”; but of course ‘a fine barrel of oysters’ is also correct, because the phrase, “barrel of oysters,” is regarded as one expression. (*Cf.* ‘a beautiful pair of horses.’)

**Letter 15. TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL.**

June 3, 1783.

**William Bull**—The person to whom this letter was addressed was an Independent minister, living at Newport Pagnell, a village about five miles from Olney. He was a friend of Newton, and when the latter left Olney, he introduced him to Cowper, and Cowper and Bull became very friendly. Cowper described him as “a Dissenter, but a liberal one,” and spoke highly of him as a literary man of ability. (See Letter 16.) Bull was a great smoker, and had a quiet retreat in Cowper’s garden where he could enjoy his pipe. He was a great admirer of the writings of Madame Guyon, the French quietist and mystic, and set Cowper to translate some of her poems.

**My greenhouse**—Cowper built this greenhouse himself, and used it to sit in in the summer time. Writing to Newton in 1781, he says “he had converted it into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats...it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney.”

**Fronted**—having in front.

**Myrtles**—evergreen shrubs.

**Pattering**—an imitative word, representing the noise of raindrops falling on leaves, etc.

**A fine shower**—a light shower, composed of small drops, as opposed to heavy rain.

**Fumes**—smoke.

**Tobacco**—See Note to Letter 10. Cowper's lenience to the smoking habit in his friends, Newton and Bull, is a good illustration of his lack of the qualifications of an unbiassed critic. In theory he was an anti-tobacconist, but could find excuses for it in his friends.

**The golden age**—According to mythology, the most primitive age of man was the most perfect, and so was called "the golden age"; since then the world has become more and more corrupt. Ovid, the Roman poet, sang of four ages of the world: (1) the golden (best) age; 2. the silver (good, but not so good as the first); 3. brazen, or bronze; and 4. iron (the worst) age.

**This age of iron or lead**—'these modern days, so unromantic and degenerate'.

**Who are merely animal**—A hint of Cowper's religious depression. He felt he had lost all his spirituality.

**To write**—i.e., write poetry.

**Fruit**—i.e., poetical productions. (Yet he probably began the *Task*, his greatest poem, a month after this).

**Wanting that**—viz., poetical composition.

**Two stanzas**.—The following is the poem, composed, however, in its printed form, of four stanza.

*Song on Peace.*

"No longer I follow a sound;  
No longer a dream I pursue;  
O happiness! not to be found,  
Unattainable treasure, adieu!

I have sought thee in splendour and dress,  
In the regions of pleasure and taste;  
I have sought thee, and seemed to possess,  
But have proved thee a vision at last.

An humble ambition and hope  
The voice of pure wisdom inspires;  
'Tis sufficient, if peace be the scope,  
And the summit of all our desires.

Peace may be the lot of the mind  
That seeks it in meekness and love ;  
But rapture and bliss are confined  
To the glorified spirits above."

**A tune**—an air called, "*My fond shepherds of late*," etc.

**Letter 16.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

June 8, 1783.

This letter contains a brief character sketch of William Bull, to whom Letter 15 was addressed.

**My favourite recess**—favourite retreat. (See Note on Letter 15 as to his greenhouse).

**My myrtles**—see Note to Letter 15.

**Grass pinks**—The name "Pink" is given to many varieties of the carnation family, flowers much grown in English gardens.

**Beans**—probably the "Broad Beans," which bear a pretty white and black flower which gives a very sweet scent.

**In bloom**—in flower.

**Rivals**—the flowers first mentioned, which distracted Cowper's attention from work.

**Rev. Mr. Bull**—see Notes to Letter 15.

**You would regret, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'you are already sorry you live at such a distance because you cannot have my society ; but if you knew Bull, you would be still more sorry, because you could not have his society as well.'

**A Dissenter**—*i.e.*, one who *dissents* from the doctrines or church government of the State Church. A "Non-conformist" is one who refuses to *conform* (agree) to the government of the State Church.

**Liberal**—broad-minded ; tolerant : not bigoted.

**A man of letters**—a literary man : writer.

**Master of...not master of**—*i.e.*, 'he is the *owner* of a fine imagination. but scarcely its *master*, because he loses control of it, and it runs away with him.'

**Runs away with**—gets out of his control, like a runaway horse.

**Field of speculation**—realms of fanciful theories; *i.e.*, he indulges in all kinds of philosophical guesses.

**Every other imagination**—every other person with imagination.

**Temperament**—disposition, character.

**Levity**—lightness: frivolity.

**Pensive**—thoughtful.

**He smokes tobacco**—see Notes to Letters 10 and 16.

**Nihil est...beatum**—"Nothing is happy in every respect." Horace, *Odes*, II. XVI, 27, 28.

**Mr. Fychte**—From the context, Mr. Fychte was evidently a lay patron who claimed the right to dismiss a clergyman from a living in his gift, for immorality. The case was brought before the Privy Council, and it went against Mr. Fychte; *i.e.*, it was ruled that a lay patron had no legal right of dismissing a clergyman for this cause. Cowper very rightly says that to check such abuses either the bishops, or the lay patrons, should have the power of dismissal.—In the English Established Church, the "livings," as the appointments of clergymen are called, are in the gift of many different persons, some ecclesiastical officers, as bishops, some laymen. The owner of a "living," who has the power to appoint a clergymen as Rector or Vicar of the parish (called technically, "presenting to a living"), is called the "Patron." He can appoint, but once appointed, the clergyman is fixed for life, and cannot be turned out by the patron. He can be removed only by his bishop, or the superior Church Courts.

**Mortifying**—disappointing.

**A single voice**—one vote.

**A peer**—a member of the House of Lords: here, of the Privy Council.

**Secure of**—safe to get.

**Conditional presentations**, etc.—*i. e.*, if it was the custom to present clergymen to livings only on condition of their good behaviour.

**Benefice**—"living": appointment. (*Lit.*, "blessing.")

**As the judges their office**—*i. e.*, in the same way that the judges hold their office, namely," etc.

**Upon the terms of quamdiu**, etc.—*i. e.*, "upon condition that he should hold his appointment 'as long as he behaves well,'" : *i. e.*, during good conduct. These are the terms on which judges hold their appointments, but formerly, up to the year 1701, they held them only *durante beneplacito*, *i. e.*, "during (the king's) good pleasure."

**The Establishment**—The Established Church, the Church of England.

**Discipline**—power to administer proper discipline.

**Somewhere**—vested in some authority.

**The Bishops**—The Church of England, like the Church of Rome, is Episcopal in its constitution : *i. e.*, it is governed by high ecclesiastical authorities, called Bishops. A Bishop is a superior clergyman, who has administrative authority over the spiritual affairs of a large district, called a Diocese, which comprises many parishes, cared for by clergymen called rectors, vicars, and curates. Bishops have considerable authority over the lower clergy, but they are often reluctant to exercise it to the full.

**Lay patron**—see note above.

**Their hands tied**—their authority limited.

**Your state**—*i. e.*, your statement.

**Pertinent**—suitable ; in place : relevant.'

**Misconceive it**—*i. e.*, 'have a wrong conception, or idea, of it,'

**They go for nothing**—*i. e.*, they (my reflections) have no value.

**He presented**—*i. e.*, 'he presented the clergyman to the living ;' *i. e.*, appointed him to the post.



**Parson**—clergyman, minister. (*Parson* is really the same word as "person": and the clergyman got to be called "the person" of the village, because he was so important. For the pronunciation, *cf.* the pronunciation of clerk ('clark'), Derby ('Darby'), Hertford ('Har'ford') etc.—

**Proved**—turned out to be.

**He should have**—*he, i. e.*, the patron.

**Call upon**—demand of.

**A something**—a slight, unimportant piece.

**A song if you please**—*i. e.*, 'you can call it a song if you like.' The poem referred to is that called *The Rose*. It was suggested by Cowper's breaking the stem of a rose which had just been given by Mrs. Unwin ("Mary") to Lady Austen ("Anna"), when they had just returned from an evening walk. It is as follows:—

"The rose had been washed, just washed in a shower,  
Which Mary to Anna conveyed,  
The plentiful moisture encumbered the flower,  
And weighed down its beautiful head.

The cup was all filled, and the leaves were all wet,  
And it seemed, to a fanciful view,  
To weep for the buds it had left with regret  
On the flourishing bush where it grew.

I hastily seized it, unfit as it was  
For a nosegay, so dripping and drowned,  
And swinging it rudely, too rudely, alas!  
I snapped it—it fell to the ground.

And such, I exclaimed, is the pitiless part  
Some act by the delicate mind,  
Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart  
Already to sorrow resigned.

This elegant rose, had I shaken it less,  
Might have bloomed with its owner a while;  
And the tear that is wiped with a little address,  
May be followed, perhaps, by a smile "

**Letter 17. TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.***Aug. 4, 1783.*

This letter is interesting for its note on ballad poetry ; and for another example of Cowper's ability to give a trivial incident interest by his description of it.

**William Unwin**—See Note to Letter 3.

**Sensibly obliged**—feelingly thankful.

**My productions**—poems. His first volume was published Mar. 1st, 1782.

**Johnson**—his publisher. See Note to Letter 7.

**The enquiry**—doubtless as to how the book was selling.

**The worst**—*i. e.*, the failure of the book.

**Judges**—*i. e.*, people capable of judging or forming an opinion on poetry.

**Thereby**—*i. e.*, by having “a few capable judges in my favour.”

**Disposed, etc.**—*i. e.*, inclined to feel very anxious.

**To aim, etc.**—*i. e.*, ‘even a poet could not, in the 18th century, expect to be both popular and religious in his poetry.’

**Were**—would be (subj. mood)

**In days like these**—The 18th cent. was noted for its scepticism, materialism, and unimaginative character.

**Aversion**—dislike. *Lit.* “a turning from.”

**A dissipated age**—*i. e.*, an age given over to extravagance, pleasure and vice. (**Dissipated**=*lit.* ‘scattered,’ ‘dispersed’: so, ‘given to extravagance’).

**Ask the question**—*viz.*, “the enquiry” from Johnson, the publisher, referred to above.

**Shake his head and drop his chin**—*i. e.*, make signs of disappointment (at the sale of the book).

**The fault**—*viz.*, of the unpopularity of the volume.

**Acquit the poet**—not blame Cowper, the author.

**My Latin Ode**—Cowper's translation into Latin, in a metre used by Horace, of his own poem *On the Loss of the Royal George*.

**My English Dirge**—Cowper's poem, *On the Loss of the Royal George*, written Sept. 1782. (*Dirge*=a mournful song). This "dirge" was written, at the suggestion of Lady Austen, to commemorate a tragic event that happened on Aug. 12. 1782. An English man-of-war, the *Royal George*, when in harbour at Portsmouth, suddenly upset and went down, and more than 800 people were drowned. The accident probably was due to an improper arrangement of the heavy guns.

**The tune**—the poem is written to be sung to the music of the March in *Scipio*, an opera by the great German-English musician, Handel.

**Laid me under a disadvantage**—'made it difficult for me to write the poem, because of the metre necessary.'

**Alexandrine**.—hexameters: *i. e.*, lines consisting of six poetic feet, or twelve syllables. Called Alexandrines, because old French poems written in praise of Alexander the Great, were written in this metre. The first verse of Cowper's "English Dirge" will illustrate the metre:—"Toll for / the brave! / The brave / that are / no more!

/ All sunk / beneath / the wave/, fast by / their na/tive shore /."

**Suit no ear**—*i. e.*, please no one's taste. (*Ear* means the taste, or power of appreciation, in music and poetry: *e. g.*, "he was no ear for music,"=he cannot appreciate music, has no musical taste).

**A French one**—the Alexandrine metre being originally a French metre.

**Accommodated**—suited.

**The ballad**—Cowper's poem is written in a metre something like that of the regular old ballad; hence he naturally begins to speak of that form of poetry. The

*ballad* is a popular song, either romantic or historical in subject. It was a favourite form of poetry in old England, and many very fine specimens survive. The first great collection of these old songs was made by Bishop Percy, an antiquarian, in his *Reliques*, not long before this letter was written, in 1765.

**Peculiar to this country**—There are ballads in other literatures, but the English ballads are the most numerous and the finest.

**Drollest**—funniest, most humorous.

**Our forefathers**—The best English ballads are old.

**We moderns**—modern writers.

**Odes**—An ode (Greek, *ōdē*, a song) is a lyrical poem, generally having a lofty subject. Cf. Wordsworth's Ode on the "Intimations of Immortality." It was a favourite poetical form with the Greeks.

**Many excellent ballads**—*i.e.*, *Cherry Chase*, *The Battle of Otterburne*, etc. A verse out of *Cherry Chase* will illustrate the old ballad metre ;—

" Then sayd / the doug/te' Dog/las

Unto / the lord / persé : /

To kyll / all these / guiltless / men

Alas ! / it wear great / pitté./

Comparing this with Cowper's verse, it will be seen that it is composed of two hexameter lines, (the first and second, third and fourth, being read together): though these hexameters are not strictly regular.

**To boast of**—to be proud of possessing.

**Grave matters**—religious subjects.

**Another way**—*i.e.*, to writing long poems in heroic metre (rhymed pentameters).

**Addicted myself to it**—'given myself up to writing ballads.'

(Cowper's famous "John Gilpin" is a ballad).

**My father**—Dr. John Cowper, rector of Berkhamstead.

**At a time when, etc.**—The poets Gay, Prior and Allen Ramsay wrote ballads, at the time when Cowper's father was living. But the great old English ballads were much older than that, and go back to the Middle Ages.

**Gay's ballad**—John Gay, the poet, who lived 1688-1732, wrote a drama called *The what d'ye call it?* in which there is a song beginning "Twas when the seas were roaring."

**Swift's**—Jonathan Swift, Dean of Dublin, (lived 1667-1745), the able satirist and political writer; author of *The Battle of the Books*, *The Tale of a Tub*, *Gulliver's Travels*, etc.

**Arbuthnot's**—Dr. John Arbuthnot, the writer; born 1675, died 1735.

**Pope's**—See Note to Letter 10.

**Contributed**—*i.e.*, to the composing of this ballad.

**Beneath them**—below their dignity.

**Puny days**—degenerate age.

**Bourne**—See Note to Letter 8.

**Translated**—*i.e.*, into Latin.

**Jvid or Tibullus**—see Notes to Letter 8.

**Tenderest strokes**—most pathetic touches, or expressions.

**A worthy subject**—said ironically.

**To so ill a purpose**—with so little good result.

**Thrust into**—pay attention to.

**Goldfinches**—a species of small singing-bird, with yellow plumage. As we have already seen, Cowper kept many pets.

**Fountain**—the vessel which contained the bird's drinking water.

**Discovered**—showed,

**His proper mansion**—his own cage.

**At a pinch**—*i.e.*, when I am at a loss for something to do.

**The versification of them**—*i.e.*, writing poems on them. Cowper wrote his poem, *The faithful bird*, (or, *The faithful friend*), on this incident. The last stanza of the poem is as follows:—

“O ye, who never knew the joys  
Of friendship, satisfied with noise,  
Fandango, ball, and rout!  
Blush, when I tell you how a bird  
A prison with a friend preferred  
To liberty without.”

**Divert me**—amuse me.

**Letter 18.** TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Nov. 30, 1783.

This letter gives another example of Cowper's delightfully humorous imagination—the description of daily life among the Antediluvians.

**John Newton**—See Notes to Letter 3.

**I have neither**, etc.—*i.e.*, living in retirement in the country, I am not obliged to waste my time in society visits.

**An economist of time**—a careful manager of my time.

**Station**—position in life.

**Playthings and avocations**—amusements and serious pursuits. (*Avocation* is strictly a pursuit for one's leisure, meaning *lit.* ‘a calling away from,’ ‘a diverting of one's attention from’ one's business. *Vocation* is, strictly, one's business, calling. But ‘avocation is often used for ‘vocation.’)

**To us**,—(There should be no comma after *us*).

**Business**, etc.—*i.e.*, even in the most retired life, we shall certainly find some pursuit which, however unim-

portant, will appear to us to be our business.

**Stillest retreat**—most quiet retirement.

**A just demand**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘as rightly demanding,’ etc.

**Necessities**—necessary occupations.

**Stolen away**—taken up.

**Observe**—remark.

**The Antediluvian world**—the world before the Flood; (Latin, *ante*, before, and *diluvium*, flood). The Flood referred to is the universal deluge described in the Bible (*Genesis*, VII. 11—24.), when all mankind, except Noah and his family, were drowned.

**A life almost millenary**—According to the Biblical account (Bible, *Genesis*, chap. 5.), the men who lived before the Flood lived very long lives: *e.g.* Adam, 930 years, Seth, 912 years; Jared, 960 years; Methuselah: 969 years. (*Millenary*, = containing a thousand (years), from Latin, *mille*, a thousand).

**Compass**—scope; sphere.

**Indifferently**—poorly; meanly.

**Philosophical**—*i.e.*, scientific. (See Note to Letter 4).

**Acuteness of penetration**—sharpness of insight.

**Fiddles**—violins: stringed musical instruments.

**Resolve**—solve: explain.

**Before Noah**—*i.e.*, before the Flood, which happened in the time of Noah. Noah, according to the Biblical story, was the son of Lamech, the grandson of Methuselah, and the ninth in descent from Adam, the first man. In his day, mankind had become so wicked, that God decided to destroy all men by a great Flood, except Noah and his family: for “Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God.” So God instructed Noah to make a great Ark, in which he and his family and specimens of all the animals were preserved alive when the Flood came. Hence Noah became a second Adam, from whom the human race began afresh.

**Sizeable**—of a good size.

**Chase**—hunt.

**My roots**—edible plants.

**Not done enough**—not sufficiently cooked.

**The prey**—the animal he has killed.

**Far spent**—almost over.

**Primæval**—prehistoric; primitive. *Lit.* “the first age.”

**Slipt through his fingers**—passed away almost unconsciously.

**Passed away like a shadow**—*i.e.*, silently and swiftly.

**Pinched in point of**, etc.—*i.e.*, lacking in opportunities to do things. (*Pinched* = straitened; in circumstances of want; (*cf.* “his face was pinched with cold”). **In point of**—in reference to.

**Four sides of a sheet**—See Notes to Letter 4.

**The disproportion**, etc.—*i.e.*, “the small amount of time compared with the great amount of things they had to do.”

**In haste**—in a state of hurry, as if I had not sufficient time.

**Introduction.....letter**—a touch of humour, as the ‘introduction’ is much longer than the ‘letter.’ He means, he is about to mention what he really meant to write about.

**Mr. Scott**—see Note to Letter 9.

**Theological Review**—a religious journal.

**Manager**—editor.

**Insured**—secured.

**Lord Dartmouth’s Mr. Wright**—the steward of Lord Dartmouth. (See Notes to Letter 2).

**Letter 19.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

March 21, 1874.

With this letter on Dr. Johnson as a biographer and literary critic, compare Letters 4 and 14:



**William Unwin**—see Notes to Letter 3.

**Entertainment**—Unwin had lent Cowper books.

**Selling a good collection**—all his books were sold when he left the Temple for St. Albans.

**In Essex**—*i.e.*, Unwin's library, at Stock, in the county of Essex, where Unwin was clergyman.

**A waggon**—Unwin sent Cowper books in a waggon, or cart.

**Suitable vehicle for an author**—because an author is generally a poor man.

**Commodiously**—conveniently.

**Johnson's prefaces**—Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. See Notes to Letter 3.

**Vouchsafed**—condescended. (From *vouch*, to vouch or attest, affirm; and *safe*: so, "to attest as safe." To condescend to grant; to concede; to condescend).

**There must be many**—*i.e.*, Cowper had not yet read all Johnson's *Lives*.

**A part of your chaise**—*i.e.*, to bring them with you in your carriage.

**The biographer**—Dr. Johnson.

**That tribute**—*viz.*, of humble admiration.

**Happy talent**—an ability specially suitable for that work.

**Justness of sentiment**—fairness of opinion.

**Through affectation**—*i.e.*, in order to shew off his superiority as a critic.

**Sounder**—more just, more correct.

**His narrative.....rather than...**—*i.e.*, it applies more to his biographies of the poets, than to his criticism of their poetry.

**Milton's Lycidas**—See Notes to Letter 3.

**Prior**—See Notes to Letter 11.

**Capital**—principal.

**The Alma**—or, “*the Progress of the Mind*,” a philosophical poem by Prior.

**Hudibras**—a satire upon the Puritans, written by Samuel Butler (1600—80), in the reign of Chas. II.

**Never saw in them the least resemblance**—A modern eminent literary critic, however, Mr. Gosse, agrees with Johnson as to the similarity of the two poems, but says Prior’s poem is “more graceful and less wayward,” and has “more variety and versatility” than Butler’s.

**Verse of the same measure**—both being in Iambic tetrameter metre.

**Melancholy observation**—sad remark.

**Shining talents**—remarkable poetic ability.

**These luminaries**—men of poetic genius : compared to stars, or suns.

**Kindled into a brighter blaze**—become more famous than ordinary men.

**Their spots**—their defects. Astronomers make a study of the dark “spots” visible in the sun, called “sun-spots.”

**Petulance**—bad temper, peevishness. Much of Pope’s petulance was due to his bad health.

**Pope**—See Notes to Letter 11.

**Sensible of**—sensitive to.

**Restless in provocation**—i.e., ‘always provoking others to attack him’: cf. the bitter sarcasm in his *Dunciad* on many minor poets.

**Addison**—Joseph Addison, who lived 1672 to 1719, was, with his friend Richard Steele, the editor of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. He is famous as an essayist, less so as a poet. The “mean artifices” referred to were his attempt to injure his friend Pope by anticipating the latter’s translation of Homer. He was believed to have persuaded his friend Tickell to publish a rival translation, which appeared in 1715.

**Savage**—Richard Savage (born 1698, died 1743), the

son of the Countess of Macclesfield by Earl Rivers. He was a poet of some ability, writing the tragedy of *Sir Thomas Overbury*, *Love in a Veil*, *the Bastard*, *the Wanderer*, etc., but was a man of vicious life. He was condemned to death for killing a Mr. Sinclair in a drunken brawl, in 1727, but was pardoned. He died in the debtors' prison in Bristol.

**Sordidly**—meanly ; vulgarly.

**Pains**—trouble.

**Palliate**—excuse : *lit.* “ cover with a cloak,” from Latin *pallium*.

**Through a veil**—*i.e.*, in spite of the excuses made for them : same metaphor as *palliate*.

**Sycophant**—flatterer ; one who panders to the low taste of the public to be popular.

**Dryden**—see Notes to Letter 11.

**Sinning against his feelings**—Dryden was a man of pure life, yet he wrote licentious plays to please the public.

**Lewd**—lustful ; licentious.

**Conversation**—here, as often in the Bible, = “ conduct.”

**With a candle, as the prophet says, etc.**—The reference seems to be to two passages in the writings of two different prophets, Zephaniah and Ezekiel. (1) Bible, *Zephaniah*, 1. 12 : “ I (God) will search Jerusalem with candles ; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees,” etc. (2) Bible, *Ezekiel*, 22. 30. “ And I (God) sought for a man among them, that should make up the fence and stand in the gap before me for the land that I should not destroy it ; but I found none.” This may also be an allusion to the story of Diogenes, the Greek philosopher, who searched the market place with a lighted lantern in daylight in order, as he said, to find “ a man.”

**A man**—*i.e.*, a true man, a man worthy of the name.

**Arbuthnot**—See Note to Letter 17.

**Beattie**—James Beattie, a Scottish poet; lived 1735-1803. He wrote *The Minstrel, or the Progress of Genius*.

**Propose to myself**—i.e., I think I shall get.

**A glimpse from Heaven**—i.e., some little religious enlightenment.

**Evangelical light**—knowledge of the saving truths of Christ's Gospel. **Evangelical** = having to do with the *Evangel*, which is the Greek word, *Euangelion* (from *eu*, well, and *angellos*, to send, announce) which is literally translated in the English word *Gospel* (= *good-spell*, "good news.")

**Faithful to**—loyal to.

**Call him blind**—say his opinions were full of error.

**The grace**—the divine ability.

**Indulge myself, etc.**—i.e., 'allow myself the pleasure of writing notes on the margin of the pages.'

**Wantonly**—needlessly; without control.

**Deface**—spoil the appearance of.

**Your mother**—Mrs. Unwin.

**Yard-wide Irish**—i.e., Irish linen-cloth, each piece of which is a yard in width.

**Two shillings to two shillings and sixpence**—i.e., Rupee one annas eight to Rupee one annas fourteen.

**Circumference**—i.e., of his head.

**Depth of the crown**—height of the centre part of the hat.

**A round slouch**—A *slouch* hat is one made of limp, soft cloth, the brim of which hangs down all round.

**Well-cocked**—with the sides neatly turned up. The "cocked hat" of that time was triangular in shape, its three sides being turned up and fastened back.

**Chip**—a kind of straw, used for making hats.

**Letter 20. TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.***Mar. 29., 1784.*

This letter contains Cowper's amusing description of a visit from a candidate at a Parliamentary election, canvassing for votes.

**John Newton**—See Notes to Letter 5.

**His Majesty's pleasure...dissolves the Parliament**—Cowper used 'franks' (See Note to Letter 4) for his letters; and, as franks had to be endorsed by Members of Parliament, he means that, when Parliament was dissolved, he could no longer use franks till the next Parliament met.

George III. dissolved Parliament on Mar. 25, 1784; but as the great seal had been stolen, the announcement of the dissolution was delayed, so Cowper had not heard of it on Mar. 29.

The reason for this dissolution was, that the Coalition Ministry, having come to grief over Fox's India Bill, was dismissed Dec. 18, 1783, and William Pitt formed a ministry from both parties, Dec. 23rd. He struggled against a large opposition in the House of Commons until his majority sank to only one; so the King dissolved Parliament and ordered a new election, which resulted in a large majority in the new Parliament for Pitt.

**Alacrity**—eagerness; readiness.

**Extraordinary Gazette**—the Gazette was the official newspaper in which Government appointments and announcements were published: an "Extraordinary Gazette" was a special issue, announcing some unusually important event.

**As when, etc.**—(The punctuation of this long sentence might be improved to make the sense clearer. Put a comma after *As*; omit the comma after *rocks*; omit the comma after *mark*).

**Uncommonly agitated**—unusually stormy.

**These turbulent times**—Times of great political agitation.

**Orchardside**—the name of the house where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin lived.

**Shrimps or cockles**—Sea fish; shrimps are crustaceans; cockles—bivalve shell-fish.

**The water-mark**—the point beyond which the high tide usually does not reach: “high-water mark.”

**Two ladies**—Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austen.

**Snug parlour**—cosy sitting-room.

**One lady knitting**—Mrs. Unwin: See Letter 39.

(*Knitting* is really a kind of hand-weaving, by which stockings, vests, etc., are made, by means of steel needles and woollen thread).

**Netting**—making fancy mats, etc. with cotton thread by means of special needles. (So called from the resemblance of the result to a “net”):

**The gentleman**—Cowper himself.

**Winding worsted**—winding the thread bought in ‘skeins’ (loose) on to ‘reels,’ or ‘bobbins’ in sewing for knitting. *Worsted*, a variety of woollen thread, so called because first used at Worsted, a town in Norfolk.

**Mob**—crowd.

**Smart rap**—loud knock.

**Halloo’d**—shouted; cried, Hallo!

**The maid**—the servant.

**Mr. Grenville**—William Wyndham Grenville, who was a supporter of William Pitt, and candidate for Parliament for the division of which Olney formed a part.

**Puss**—one of Cowper’s tame hares. (See Letter 6).

**The grand entry**—the front door. (The hares played in the hall in the day-time).

**Referred**—sked to go to.

**Candidates, etc.**—*i.e.*, ‘a candidate for Parliament is so anxious to secure all the votes he can, that he pretends not to notice any rudeness or indifference he meets with on the part of possible voters.’ It was the custom for candidates at elections to see all the voters and try to get them to promise to vote for them.

**Reducing**—‘calculated to persuade me to give him my support.’

**Open the intent**—‘explain the purpose’: which was to ask Cowper for his vote, or his influence, at the election.

**I had no vote**—In Cowper’s day, the House of Commons was not really representative, and the agitation for Parliamentary Reform, which ended 48 years after in the Reform Bill of 1832, had already begun. Many large towns had no member in Parliament, and many very small towns, and even villages, had one, or even two, each. The property qualification for obtaining a vote was very high, and the whole body of electors very limited. Cowper would have no vote because he held no property. To-day he would have a vote as a house-holder.

**Readily gave me credit**—easily believed.

**No influence**—*viz.*, to persuade others to vote in Grenville’s favour.

**Mr. Ashburner, the drapier**—also mentioned in Letter 28. He was the “draper” of Olney, *draynier* being an old spelling. A draper is a tradesman who sells cloth goods.

**A great deal**—*viz.*, of influence.

**Kissed the ladies**—a polite form of greeting in the 18th century.

**A most loving, etc.**—Candidates put on all this effusive-cordial manner to make themselves popular and gain votes.

**Genteel**—gentlemanly.

**Nice**—delicate: requiring much tact.

**Senator**—Member of Parliament; statesman.

**A third**—*i.e.*, an eye-glass.

**Scampered**—ran about, frightened by the noise.

**Obsequious**—very submissive and obedient.

**Dispute between the Crown and the Commons**—

When Fox's India Bill was defeated in the House of Lords, George III. took the opportunity of dismissing the Coalition Ministry, Dec. 18. 1783, which was dominated by Fox, whom the king disliked. William Pitt was chosen Prime Minister, but the supporters of Fox were still in a majority in the House of Commons, and Pitt had to rule with a minority in Parliament. To remedy this impossible state of things, the king dissolved Parliament and ordered a new election, in the hope that Pitt would have a majority in the new House of Commons: a hope which was fulfilled. This election, therefore, was a struggle between the Crown (supporting Pitt) and the Commons (supporting, by a majority, Fox). Cowper's sympathies were with Fox's party.

**Consequence.....exercise any**—*Consequence* = importance. As one cannot "exercise" importance, we must understand "influence" after *any*.

**Disobliging**—offending.

**The town**—Olney.

**Much at his service**—very ready to support him.

**Throughout the country**—Olney was not a "borough", but formed part of a county division, which sent two members to parliament.

**Gain his election**—*i.e.*, be elected member of parliament. (Grenville was eventually elected, along with another Pittite).

**Mortified**—shamed; disappointed.

**But had he, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'I would not be expected to say I had influence to please Mr. A. and confirm his statement, any more than I could be expected to show I had three heads if Mr. A. had happened to affirm I had them.'

**Mr. Scott**—See Note to Letter 9. He followed Newton as curate of Olney; but Cowper never took to him, though



Lady Austen liked his preaching. Cowper's dislike of Scott was the reason why Newton introduced him to the Rev. W. Bull, who was a more congenial spiritual adviser.

**In your pulpit**—*i.e.*, when he preached in your Church, at Stock in Essex.

**This hurts him**—injures his reputation ; makes people dislike him.

**Had he**—even if he had.

**Paul**—St. Paul, the great Christian Apostle.

**But I hear it**—*i.e.*, 'without my hearing,' etc.—So = 'whenever he preaches a gentle, etc., I hear it highly commended.' (*But* is here a preposition, = except, governing the clause "I hear it, etc." in the objective).

**Scolding**—constant finding fault with ; always blaming.

**Defeats the end of preaching**—the end, or purpose, of preaching is to win and persuade people to love God and be good, not to disgust them with constant condemnation.

**A misapplication, etc.**—*i.e.* 'he has powers as a preacher, but in this way he misapplies them or applies them wrongly.'

**Cripples**—maims ; renders weak and ineffective ; drives his hearers away, *i.e.*, people don't like to go to hear him preach.

**Outgrow it**—*i.e.*, as he grows older and wiser he may give up this habit.

**Conclude ourselves**—*i.e.*, 'at the conclusion of the letter we affirm ourselves to be, etc.'

**W. C., M. U.**—*i.e.*, William Cowper and Mary Unwin.

**Letter 21.** TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

*April 26, 1784.*

This letter contains some interesting literary criticism, and a lively account of an election riot.

**John Newton**—see Note to Letter 5.

**Indisposed**—in ill health.

**Fared no worse**—experienced nothing more serious than a cold and sore-throat.

(*To fare* is *lit.* to travel, journey: cf. “*fare-well*”).

**Ague**—a marsh fever that produces fits of shivering and trembling.

**Rheumatic pain**—pain due to rheumatism, an affection of the muscles due to excess of uric acid in the system.

**Excruciating**—agonising: extremely painful. (Derived from Latin *crux*, *crucis*, a cross: ‘a pain like that of crucifixion’).

**Here was a talk**—*i.e.*, the doctor recommended.

**Bleeding and blistering**—medical knowledge was very primitive in those days, and *bleeding*, or blood-letting, was a common remedy for all kinds of ills: it is now little used.

**Blistering** = putting on a burning plaster to draw away the inflammation.

**Embrocation**—lotion, fomentation, for rubbing on his back.

**Mr. Grindon**—Dr. George Grindon, the Olney doctor.

**Fidgets**—goes about in a fussy, restless manner.

**Apoplexy**—paralysis due to congestion or rupture of blood-vessels in the brain.

**Paralytic one**—“paralytic stroke”: the same, really, as apoplexy: paralysis being the result of apoplexy,

**Country**—district: part of the country.

**An Æsculapius**—*i.e.*, “an ideal doctor.” Æsculapius, the son of Apollo, was, in Greek Mythology, the god of medicine.

**Fraternity**—brotherhood: the medical profession.

**A practitioner upon**, etc.—*i.e.*, one who practises on

(*i.e.*, treats medically) the constitutions of others. (A doctor is often called a "practitioner").

**Constitutions**—physical condition of the body. (We say, a man has a strong, or weak, constitution: meaning he is naturally strong or weak).

**Your book**—probably, Newton's *Review of Ecclesiastical History*. See Letter .

**Runs**—is successful: is selling well.

**Their party**—their religious views.

**The liberal**—the broad-minded, who are not influenced by mere party spirit.

**Beattie**—See Note to Letter 19. Probably Cowper here refers to Beattie's *Dissertations, Moral and Political*, published in 1783.

**Most agreeable of the two**—should be the comparative, *more agreeable*.

**Dry subjects**—uninteresting.

**Easy**—opposed to stiff, formal: familiar.

**Pedantic**—making a show of unnecessary correctness of expression.

**His air**—his manner; the spirit in which he writes. *Style* refers to the language and constitution of sentences.

**Sollicitous**—anxious: eager.

**In Blair....in Beattie**—*i.e.*, "on reading their writings, we find that Blair, etc., and that Beattie, etc."

**Aristotle**—the great Greek philosopher, the founder of the Peripatetic School, and of the Science of Logic. He was born at Stagira in 384. B.C. (whence he is sometimes called the "Stagirite"), and died at Chalcis in B.C. 322. He wrote on logic, rhetoric, politics, ethics, etc.

**Acumen**—penetration: *lit.*, sharpness.

**Upon the occasion**—*viz.*, of my reading these works.

**The art of writing and composing**—*i.e.*, rhetoric, of which Aristotle and these authors treated.

**Any great news**—*i.e.*, anything of importance, that I did not know before.'

**Observations**—*i.e.*, what I have observed; learnt from experience.

**Many**,—there should be no comma after *many*, the relative, of *which*, being restrictive in force.

**Apprized**—informed: caused to know.

**Dictated**—proved: shewed.

**Congruous to**—suitable: in harmony with.

**Prompted**—taught: inspired.

**Embellishments**—literary adornments, in style and ideas.

**These items**—the above-mentioned points.

**Observance of**—obedience to.

**An art**—*viz.*, of composition: rhetoric.

**Exemplified**—given examples of in their writings.

**A map of the boundaries**, etc.—*i.e.*, a system rules to of composition which a writer of imagination should of try follow.

**Judges**—*Critic lit.* means "judge": (Greek, *Krites*).

**Pestered**—annoyed: troubled.

**Vagaries**—lawless freaks: *lit.* "wanderings."

**Hardiness**—boldness; rash courage.

**Them**—the "boundaries" above-mentioned.

**Candidates**—Parliamentary candidates.

**Economy**—thrift; carefulness in money matters.

**On both sides**—*i.e.*, the candidates of both parties, *viz.*, Pittite and Foxite.

**Defray**—meet: pay.

**Houses**—public-houses: drink-shops. The candidates generally opened the public-houses at elections, and gave free drinks to voters and others: a practice which caused great drunkenness and riot.

**Rabble**—mob: disorderly crowd.

**Stage**—platform.

**Harangue**—speak to.

**Electors**—voters.

**First victim**—first thing attacked.

**Nothing better than words**—*i.e.*, no drink.

**Hustings**—the temporary platform on which parliamentary candidates used to stand to address the electors. Abolished after the Ballot Act of 1872. (From Anglo-Saxon *hus*, house, and *thing*, council: “house-meeting”).

**Sheriff**—the chief county officer, whose duty it is to carry out the sentences of the Judges of Assize, and to preside at parliamentary elections. (From *shire*, county, and *reeve*, bailiff).

**The members**—of Parliament.

**Rallied**—gathered together again to resist.

**They then.....they had fled**—*i.e.*, ‘the rioters then’ .....‘the voters, etc., had fled.’

**Freeholders**—men holding land in their own right, as *freehold*, *i.e.*, free of duty, and not on lease; (only such in those days had votes).

**Face about**—turn round with a view of resisting.

**A Merry Andrew**—a buffoon or mountebank, who, at fairs, used to dress in fantastic costume and dance and talk to amuse the people. (So called, either because (1) *Andrew* was a common name in old plays for a man-servant, as was Abigail for a maid, or from (2) Andrew Borde, physician to King Henry VIII., who used to teach the public at fairs etc., in a popular style, dressed in queer garments.

**Mr. Asbburner**—the draper. (See Letter 21).

**Him into custody**—made him a prisoner.

**Animated**—encouraged, inspired.

**Ragamuffins**—ragged fellows: mean, paltry people. (Probably from *Ragamafin*, the name of a demon in some old mystery plays: from *rag*, a torn piece of cloth, and *muff*, a long sleeve).

**W. and M.**—William (Cowper) and Mary (Unwin).

**Letter 22.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Oct. 20, 1784.

The letter deals further with the *Task*; and refers to two other poems, *Tirocinium* and *John Gilpin*.

**William Unwin**—see Note to Letter 3.

**Your letter**—evidently praising the *Task*.

**Anxiety**—as to how Unwin would like the *Task*.

**Implicit**—absolute: unhesitating.

**So long a poem**—i.e., the *Task*.

**Must know little of his own heart**—i.e., have little self-knowledge: little insight into his own feelings.

**Partiality**—special favouritism.

**Mortified**—shamed, humiliated.

**In vain**—to no good purpose: i.e., failed to please his friends and the public.

**The poem which you have in hand**—viz., *The Task*.

**Johnson**—his publisher.

**A piece**—viz., *Tirocinium*; or a *Review of Schools*.

**Fruitful**—full of ideas and suggestions.

**Comprised**—contained.

**Education at school**—the poem strongly condemns public school life, and probably sprang out of Cowper's sufferings as a boy at a boarding school.

**Pursue the track**—follow in the same way.

**Stock**—where Unwin lived: *i.e.*, he would send the MS. to Unwin to read, as he had done that of the *Task*.

**Inscribe**—dedicate. *Tirocinium* bears this dedication: "To the Rev. William Cawthorne Unwin, Rector of Stock, in Essex, the tutor of his two sons, the following poem, recommending private tuition in preference to an education at school, is inscribed by his affectionate friend, William Cowper."

**The tittle of an *i***—*i.e.*, the dot over the letter *i*. *Tittle* is akin to "title," and meant the distinguishing mark over a letter. Hence, the smallest particular.

**Deny myself that pleasure**—*i.e.*, 'will forego the pleasure of dedicating the poem to you.'

**John Gilpin: The Diverting History of John Gilpin**—written Oct. 1782, and first published without name in the *Public Advertiser* on Nov. 14. 1782. It at once became very popular, and is still the best known of Cowper's short poems. It was recited in 1785 at the Freemasons' Hall by John Henderson, the actor, and Johnson, the publisher, objected to its being included in the volume with the *Task* because it had been "hackneyed in every magazine, in every newspaper, and in every street."

We owe *John Gilpin*, as we do the *Task*, and *The Loss of the Royal George*, to the suggestion and inspiration of Lady Austen. Lady Austen told him the story, and he lay awake at night laughing over it, and the next morning wrote the poem.

**At the tail of all**—at the end of the volume.

**He has made**, etc.—see above note: *i.e.*, the poem has become very popular.

**Occasionally**—*John Gilpin* is a purely humorous poem.

**The Critical Reviewers**, etc.—*i.e.*, the writers in the *Critical Review*, set up in opposition to the *Monthly Review* (see Letter 11) in 1756, by Archibald Hamilton.

**An attempt at humour**—implying that the “attempt” was not successful. This refers to a criticism of his first volume of poetry, the reviewer saying that Cowper had not succeeded in his “attempt to be lively, facetious and satirical, any more than in the serious and pathetic.”

**John**—*i.e.*, *John Gilpin*.

**Upon the score of**—on account of.

**Exonerate**—clear; find me not guilty.

**Imputation**—the accusation of the reviewers that he was wanting in humour.

**This article**—this point, item: *viz.*, whether *John Gilpin* should be included or not.

**Under your judgment**—*i.e.*, willing to be guided by your opinion.

**Set down**—guided, settled.

**All these together**—*The Task*, *Tirocinium*, and *John Gilpin*.

**Octavo**—see note to Letter.

**The piece**—*viz.*, *Tirocinium*.

**Employs me**—*i.e.*, on which I am working.

**Blank**—*i.e.*, blank verse.

**Make the offer of my book**—*i.e.*, ask Johnson to publish it.

**Johnson**—his publisher.

**Stroke his chin**—a sign of hesitation or doubt.

**Look up to the ceiling**—implying hesitation.

**“Humph!”**—an exclamation of dislike.

**Anticipate him**—be beforehand with him: speak before he can express his dislike of the book.

**Undertake**—*viz.*, the publication.

**Punctilio**—point of etiquette: *viz.*, the offering of the book to his old publisher.



**A matter of indifference to me**—*i.e.*, 'I don't care.'

**Sends me forth**—published my book.

**Longman**—the publisher.

**Have difficulties**—*i.e.*, be unwilling to publish.

**See with his own eyes**—judge for himself.

**A brother poet**—*i.e.*, some other poet, a rival to the one who wants his poems published.

**Hawked about**—*i.e.*, his book offered for sale to any publisher who will take it. (~~To~~ *hawk* = to try to sell goods by offering them to people from door to door: a *hawker* = a pedlar, or packman, who travels from place to place carrying goods for sale).

**Nichols**—a publisher.

**Printer**—publisher.

**Man of taste, etc.**—*i.e.*, not only a scholar, or learned man, but a man with the power of discerning what is excellent in literature.

**Gentleman usher**—an official whose duty it is to introduce people at public functions.

**Gentleman's Magazine**—a periodical begun in 1731 by Edward Cave.

**Authors who**—there should be no comma after *authors*, the relative being restrictive.

**In that case**—*i.e.*, if no publisher will take the book.

**Should write no more**—because he could not afford to publish at his own expense.

**My dedicatory proposal**—see above.

**Banged your order**—attacked the clergy.

**Alma Mater**—*lit.* Loving, or fostering mother, a term applied to a "University," because it trains and educates the students, its children.

**Banged her too**—attacked Unwin's University as well: *viz.*, Cambridge. Cf. *Tirocinium*, 240—6.

**Lay yourself, etc.**—*i.e.*, don't feel obliged to allow me to dedicate the poem to you.

**Endless scribblement**—long letter. (*Scribblement* = something *scribbled*: to *scribble* = to write carelessly).

**Letter 23.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Nov. 1, 1784.

This letter treats further of the publication of *The Task*, *Tirocinium*, and *John Gilpin*.

**William Unwin**—See Notes to Letter 3.

**Were I to delay**—*i.e.*, 'Even if I delayed,'—or 'should delay.'

**Without a frank**—*i.e.*, at Unwin's expense; see Note to Letter 4.

**Your friendly offices**—*i.e.*, in getting Johnson to publish his volume' (*Offices* = services).

**In the first instance**—See Letter 22, in which Cowper had asked Unwin to offer his MS. to Johnson in the first place.

**Proved the last**—*i.e.*, 'you had not to take the trouble of seeing any other publishers.' (*Proved* = turned out to be).

**A second volume**—Johnson had published Cowper's first volume of poems.

**The former**—*Table Talk, etc.*—the first volume.

**Collect**—gather, conclude.

**May not wrong him neither**—the double negative, *not.....neither*, is incorrect: should be *not.....either*. *Wrong* = cause him financial loss.

**Your heart fluttered**—'beat quicker with anxiety': *i.e.*, you felt anxious.

**Discharged of a burthen**—relieved: (because he had accepted the book).

**The Thorntons**—Mr. John Thornton was a rich merchant, who had sent a copy of Cowper's first volume to Benjamin Franklin, the American.

**Pretend to a share in my confidence**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘pretend to know my secrets more than you really do.’ Thornton was a friend of Newton.

**I was gone to the press**—*i.e.*, ‘I was about to publish.’

**Perhaps not pleased**—because Cowper had not told him about his plans, as he had Unwin.

**Authorly secrets**—secrets of authorship: *i.e.*, secrets as to what books he was writing.

**Participating**—sharing.

**Reserve**—*i.e.*, keeping his purposes secret.

**Concur**—agree.

**Of one**—*i.e.*, of one reason.

**A greater**—*i.e.*, a greater pleasure.

**Eradicating**—getting rid of: *lit.* “uprooting.”

**Weeds of suspicion**—even small feelings of suspicion: (*weeds* keeps up the figure of *eradicating*, “up-rooting”).

**That might.....that any man**—the first (1) *that* = relative, referring to “suspicion”: the second (2) *that* = conjunction, introducing the noun clause after “suspicion.”

**Nearer to me**—*i.e.*, is a greater friend, more in my confidence.

Unwin had felt rather hurt because Cowper had consulted Newton about his first volume of poems, and not him. See Letter 7.

**Forced up the lid of my strong box**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘compelled me to reveal my secret.’ A *strong-box* is a safe.

**Inviolable closeness**—‘secrecy not be broken, or profaned.’

**From the public papers**—*i.e.*, announcing the publication of the book.

**Do I give to any man a precedence**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘do I allow any one to come before you in my regard.’

**TiROCINIUM**—See Note to Letter 22.

**As the Muse permits**—‘as poetic inspiration comes.’

**Mr. Smith**—See Notes to Letters 17 and 29.

**Franks**—See Note to Letter 4: paper endorsed by members of Parliament, and allowed to go *free* (*frank*) through the post.

**Lucubrations**—compositions: *lit.*, writings composed at night, by lamp-light, from Latin, *lucubratio*, from *lucubro*, to study by lamp-light, from *lux*, light).

**John Gilpin**—See Note to Letter 22.

**Nobody's child.....owned at last**—*John Gilpin* was first published anonymously: when published in this volume it would be acknowledged as Cowper's work.

**A touch**—an amendment, improvement.

**Mend him**—*him* = the poem.

**Quaint**—antique and singular: whimsical.

**A false rhyme**—an incorrect rhyme: (such as *time* with *thine*).

**Given the finishing stroke to his figure**—*i.e.*, finally revised the poem. (Cowper speaks affectionately of "John Gilpin" as though he was a real person whom he was dressing and adorning to make his appearance in public).

**Grace him**—adorn the poem.

**Two mottoes**, etc.—Cowper does not seem to have carried this intention out, as *John Gilpin* has no mottoes attached to it. But another poem published in this volume, *Trocinium*, has two Greek mottoes: *viz.*:—*Kephalaion dē paisteias orthē trophē*, (Plato): "The mind is the true object of instruction": and, *Archē politeias ap'isēs neōn trophō*, (Diogenes Laert.); "The education of youth is the foundation of civil government."

**A little one of three words**—*viz.*, *Fit surculus arbor*, "The twig becomes a tree," referring to the way in which the long poem, *The Task*, grew out of the short piece, originally intended, on *The Sofa*.

**Will perhaps understand**—Object, = *which* (referring to "two mottoes").

**A stricture**—censure.

**Pompous display of literature**—proud display of learning. (It was the fashion in the 18th century to give many quotations from classical authors in the titles of books and headings of chapters).

**Knox**—Dr. Vicesimus Knox, head-master of Tunbridge School, author of *Essays, Moral and Literary*: lived 1752—1821.

**Who is a sensible man too**—*i. e.*, although, in spite of the fact that, he is a sensible man.

**Half a dozen** —*i. e.*, mottoes.

**Letter 24.**

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Nov. 27, 1784.

This letter was evidently written to mollify the hurt feelings of Newton at not having been consulted about the writing of the *Task*, and contains information about that poem and *Tirocinium*.

**John Newton**—See Note to Letter 5.

**All the interest, etc.**—Newton had evidently written to Cowper complaining that a friend who took such an interest in his poetic work as he did had not been informed before of Cowper's new volume.

**Pleas**—reasons.

**Struck me**—appeared to me.

**Regard**—esteem and affection.

**Make no abatement**—make no decrease.

**Opposite claims**—*viz.*, my claim to the right of keeping my projects secret, and your claim to know them.

**I have done my best**—*viz.*, to satisfy all parties, *i. e.*, you, my other friends, and myself.

**Candour**—sense of justice: straightforwardness.

**Put a just interpretation, etc.**—understand in a fair and just way.

**It**—in apposition to the noun clause, "that whatever, etc.....I am in reality," etc.

**In point of**—in the matter of: as regards.

**Chargeable with**—capable of being accused of. (*With* governs “whatever seeming defects”).

**As clear of all real ones**—‘as guiltless of all real shortcomings in attention and attachment to you.’

**Advertisement to the reader**—explanatory preface addressed to the reader: see Note to Letter 29, where it is given in full.

**My title**—*The Task*: Cowper regarding it as a “task” imposed on him by his friend, Lady Austen: cf. the opening lines;—

“I sing the Sofa. I, who lately sung  
Truth, Hope, and Charity,.....

.....  
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;  
The theme though humble, yet august and proud  
Th’ occasion—for *the fair commands the song.*”

**Argument**—outline of the line of thought.

**Circumstantial**—detailed.

**Diffuse**—expanded; expressed in many words.

**Tenons and mortises**—terms taken from the art of building: a *tenon* being the end of a beam which is inserted into the *mortise*, or socket of another, to hold the two together. So “connecting links.”

**Extract**—from the *The Task*.

**Images**—metaphors: allusions.

**Scriptural**—from the Bible.

**Sublimity**—majesty: lofty grandeur.

**Scripture language**—the style of the English translation of the Bible.

**May please you**—Mr. Newton being a strictly religious man, and a Bible scholar.

**Numbers**—metre: rhythm.

**Diction**—style: language.

**Sample**—specimen.

**My principal purpose**, etc.—Cf. Letter 29.

**A'lure**—tempt.

**Embellishments**—adornments.

**Predilection**—choice : desire.

**Metropolis**—*lit.* “mother city”: from Greek *mēter*, mother, and *polis*, city: the chief city of any country. Here, London. (There should be no comma after “metropolis,” the relative *that* being restrictive).

**Beggars**—makes poor.

**The country**—‘the rural parts, as opposed to the town.’ At this time, when the great Industrial Revolution was beginning in England owing to the great development of manufactures by important mechanical inventions, the country populations was being attracted to the large towns in great numbers by the higher wages and greater opportunities industry offered as compared with agriculture. This tendency rapidly increased in the following century, so that, whereas up to the 19th century, the greater part of the population of England was rural, now it is urban.

**Collaterally**—*lit.* “side by side” *i.e.*, along with, at the same time : so, indirectly ; accompanying, but subsidiary.

**This double intention**—*i.e.*, the two purposes just named.

**To have a stroke at**—to attack.

**The Universities**—specially Oxford and Cambridge. Cf. *Task*, II. 699—710.

**General Evening Post**—a newspaper.

**Has all the appearance**, etc.—seems quite genuine.

**Those bodies**—the Universities. (The Universities in Cowper's day no doubt deserved his censure. The education given was confined to dry, grammatical teaching of the classics, and the discipline was bad. They were very

different to the active and noble centres of learning they are to day).

**This subject**—higher education.

**Tirocinium**—See Notes on Letters 22 and 23.

**Obtain**—prevails.

**Article**—item; matter: “in the article of”=regarding, respecting.

**Debauched**—morally corrupted.

**It recommends**, etc.—*i.e.*, it advises every father to teach his own boys at home.

**Impediment**—hindrance to doing so.

**Domestic tutor**—a tutor living in the house.

**Where there is**—*viz.*, “an impediment.”

**Disposal**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘putting the boys under the charge of.’

**An instance in point**—a suitable example of such home education. (See Dedication to *Tirocinium*, given in Note to Letter 22).

**Command your hunger to be patient**—*i.e.*, restrain your eagerness to see the book.

**Luncheon**—light mid-day meal: metaphorical for the “extract” referred to above.

**Dinner**—the heavy meal of the day: metaphorical for the book itself.

**Piecemeal perusal**—‘reading the book in separate portions, as the proof-sheets came from the press.’ Newton had apparently asked to see the proofs before the book came out. (*Piece-meal*, from *piece*, and Anglo-Saxon *maelum*, by parts).

**Disadvantageous to the work**—*i.e.*, “it would give you an unfair idea of it.”

**Waive**—forego: give up.

**Disjointed**—separated: broken up into little bits.

**Tully’s rule**, etc.—*Tully*—Marcus Tullius Cicero, the



great Roman orator, politician, philosopher and writer; lived 106. B.C. to 41 B.C., *i.e.*, in the days of Julius Cæsar.

**Nulla dies sine linea**—"No day without a line"; *i.e.*, 'Let no day pass without writing something, or doing some piece of work.'

**Will make a volume**, etc.—*i.e.*, 'if a writer observes this rule, and writes a little every day, he will soon find he has written a book.'

**Adhered**—kept: observed.

**Rigidly**—strictly.

**To compass**—to manage to write.

**A more fluent vein**—"a mood in which I could compose more freely and easily."

**I do not mean to write blank verse**—cf Letter 22.

**Music of rhymes**—"the pleasing sound which rhymes give."

**The pause**—In every line of blank verse, or indeed any metre, there should be a slight pause, or break, called the "*cæsura*," to prevent the rhythm becoming monotonous. If this pause falls in the same place in each line, a very monotonous effect is produced. Milton was very skilful in his management of the *cæsura*.

**Cadence**—*lit.* "falling": the modulation and rhythmic structure of the verse.

**Peculiar mode of expression**—involving, as it often does, "inversions" in construction, etc.

**Meddled with**—tried to write: troubled about.

**Mr. Bacon**—See Notes to Letter 31.

**Finest**—most refined: delicate.

**Letter 25.** TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

*Ap.* 30, 1875.

Treats of the popularity of *John Gilpin*; the reconciliation with Newton; and the returning favour of some old acquaintances owing to his fame as a poet.

**William Unwin**—See Note to Letter 3.

**Warm with the intelligence**—‘full of the pleasure of a loving friend at being able to give such good news.’

**John Gilpin**—see Letter 22 and Notes.

**I little thought**, etc.—Cowper wrote the poem at first simply for his own and his friends’ amusement, with no thought of publication. *Cf.* his words in a letter to Unwin, Nov. 18, 1782 :—“ I little thought when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print. I intended to laugh and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you are one. But now all the world laughs.”

**I mounted him up on my Pegasus**—*i.e.*, ‘ I took him as a subject to exercise my poetic gift on : made a poem about him.’ Pegasus was a legendary winged-horse, captured by Bellerophon and ridden by him when fighting and slaying the Chimæra. As Pegasus was a favourite of the Muses (goddesses of poetry and art), and lived on Mount Helicon, their home, he was taken to symbolise poetic inspiration, which raises men above earthly things.

**Mrs. Gilpin**—wife of John Gilpin. *John Gilpin* is the laughable story of a London tradesman, unused to riding, who started to ride on a horse borrowed from a friend from London to Edmonton, a neighbouring village, there to celebrate with his wife and family the twentieth anniversary of his wedding day. The horse ran away with him and carried him far past Edmonton, where his wife had arrived, and when at last it stopped, it ran away with him again, carrying him back to London without stopping.

**St. Paul’s School**—one of the oldest schools in London, founded by John Colet, Dean of St. Paul’s, in 1512.

**John**—the poem, *John Gilpin*.

**Exchange civilities**—write to each other polite letters.

**Tirocinium will spoil all**—*i.e.*, ‘ his poem criticising public schools, will offend the head-master of St. Paul’s schools, and spoil their friendship.’

**This knight of the stone-bottles**—John Gilpin, who rode out with two stone bottles of wine for the feast at the Inn at Edmonton.

“Now Mrs. Gilpin (careful soul!)  
Had two stone bottles found,  
To hold the liquor that she loved,  
And keep it safe and sound.

Each bottle had a curling ear,  
Through which the belt he drew,  
And hung a bottle on each side,  
To make his balance true

\*       \*       \*       \*

And now, as he went bowing down  
His reeking head full low,  
The bottles twain behind his back  
Were shattered at a blow.”

**Propitious to the volume**—i.e., ‘the popularity of *John Gilpin* would help the sale of the volume.’

**Prelude**—introduction : beginning. (He means that *John Gilpin*, an “apparently trivial” poem, was the beginning of his popularity as a poet.)

**The disappointment that Horace mentions**—*Cf.* Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 21-2. *Amphora coepit Institui; currente rota cur urceus exit?* “It is intended that a wine-jar should be made; why, when the potter’s-wheel revolves, is the result a water-jar?” Horace speaks of a result different in *kind*; Cowper, a result different in *size*—a *mug* being a small drinking vessel, a *hogshead*, a large cask, capable of holding 52½ gallons.

**Facetious**—humorous.

**Impression**—printed copy; (so called because the words are *impressed* on the paper by the printing press).

**Writing to Johnson**—Unwin had evidently written to Johnson, Cowper’s publisher, of his dilatoriness; of which Cowper often complains, to hurry him up in publishing the book. (*Cf.* Letter 8.)

**Have operated to admiration**—‘have produced an admirable effect: have made Johnson expedite matters.’

**That the effect be lasting**—*i.e.*, ‘that the publisher continue to push the printing of the book at the same speed.’

**We now draw**, etc.—*i.e.*, we have got so far in the printing of the poem.

**Budge**—move: stir.

**So did he**—*i.e.*, he resented being hurried.

**Last**—*i.e.*, last letter.

**The propriety of your proceeding**—‘the suitableness of your arrangements.’

**We are friends again**—See Letters 23 and 24 and Notes. Newton had been offended at not having been consulted about the publication of the *Task*.

**The work**—*viz.*, of publishing the volume.

**Disburdened himself**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘unburdened himself’: ‘got rid of the unpleasant feeling between him and Cowper by making this acknowledgment.’

**Some side-wind**—some indirect means.

**Wafted**—blown: conveyed.

**These reasons**—See Letter 23, in which Cowper explains them to Unwin.

**My conduct**—*viz.*, in not informing Newton earlier of his poem.

**Studiously deposited them with**—‘carefully told them to.’

**They wanted only a hearing**—*i.e.*, it was only necessary that Newton should hear them,

**Cogency**—force.

**Bensley**—the younger brother of an old schoolfellow of Cowper. Cowper mentions the elder brother's death in a letter to Joseph Hill, dated July 3, 1765: ‘The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep.....I

was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If your can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour if you will pay him for me."

**We were schoolfellows**—*i.e.*, Cowper and the elder Beusley.

**A club of seven Westminster men**—this was the "Nonsense Club," the members of which dined together every Thursday. The seven Westminster men (*i.e.*, old boys of Westminster School) were, *Bonwell Thornton* and *Colman*, fellow-writers of periodical essays and joint proprietors of *St. James's Chronicle*; *Lloyd*, essayist and poet; *Bensley*; *Joseph Hill*, to whom several of Cowper's letters are addressed (See Note to Letter 2.); *De Grey*; and *Cowper* himself.

**Perform**, etc.—'to gain fame as a poet.' (*To some purpose* = effectively : successfully).

**Who have treated me**, etc.—this refers especially to *Thurrow* (afterwards Lord Chancellor), and *Colman*. They had dropped him after he left London, and they never acknowledged the copies of his first volume of poems which he sent them. *Joseph Hill* was the only one of his old friends who kept up his friendship with him. (See Note to Letter 2.).

**Held in that estimation**—*i.e.*, regarded as friends.

**St. Paul**—the great Christian apostle.

**Care a button**—care even a very little.

**One talent**—one natural gift ; accomplishment ; (poetry, in Cowper's case). 'This meaning of *talent* is derived from the parable of Christ's, in which a master gives five, two and one talent to three of his slaves respectively, and rewards them according to the faithfulness and energy with which they traded with them. A *talent*, literally, was a certain sum of money ; the Attic talent = £243. 15s., and the Hebrew talent = about £340.

**Rubbed a little bright**—improved, well used. (*Bright* refers to the literal meaning of talent, *viz.*, money).

**Dr. Johnson**—the great literary critic. See Letter 4.

**Life of one of our poets**, etc.—It is in Johnson's life of Young (who wrote the "*Night Thoughts*"), not in the life of Savage, that the passage referred to occurs. It runs: "To the vessel which is sailing from the shore, it only appears that the shore also recedes; in life it is truly thus. He who retires from the world will find himself, in reality, deserted as fast, if not faster, by the world."

**Savage**—See Letter 19, and Note.

**That he**,—(There should be no comma after *he*).

**The wilderness**—part of the grounds of Mr. Throckmorton (See Letter 29, Note) at Weston Underwood. Cf. *The Task*, I. 350-4.

**Fledged**—feathered: covered with feathers.

**Tailed**—provided with tails.

**My case**—*viz.*, as a poet.

**My nest is in a little nook**—*i.e.*, 'my home, where I write my poems, is in an obscure and retired village.' (*Nook* = corner).

**I brood and hatch**—'meditate and compose my poems. (The hen-bird is said to *brood* when she sits on her eggs in order to *hatch* them).

**My progeny**—my poetry.

**Takes wing and whistles**—is published, and sings to, or is read by, the world.

**Letter 26.** TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

*Sept.* 24, 1785.

This letter is interesting for its reference to the then newly-started institution of the Sunday School.

**John Newton**—See Note to Letter 5.

**Miss Cunningham**—Newton's niece.

**Delicacy of habit**—weakness of constitution ; 'habit of body.'

**Regimen**—rule (of health): treatment.

**Southampton**—a sea-side place, and now an important port, in the south coast of England. Cowper spent several months there in 1753 with Sir Thomas Hesketh.

**The Assembly-room**—the public room where visitors assembled for dancing, card-playing, and social amusement.

**Netley Abbey, etc.**—places of interest, near Southampton.

**A sailor**—used to boating, etc.

**Sir Thomas Hesketh**—See Note to Letter 27.

**Born one**—i.e., born a sailor: used to the sea from childhood.

**Pressed into the service**—persuaded to join boating excursions. (*The service*, = *the* the navy, into which, in these days, men were often *pressed*, i.e., compelled by force. The "press-gang" used to secure many unwilling recruits for the navy in these times of naval warfare).

**Gave myself an air**—affected a nautical style. (*Air* = manner).

**Trousers**—the dress of sailors in the 18th century. Gentlemen wore knee-breeches.

**That honour**—viz., behaving and dressing as a sailor.

**Occupied in great waters**—i.e., doing sailor's work, or simply sailing on the open sea. (A Biblical phrase: Cf. Psalms 107. 23: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." (*Occupied* = engaged in an occupation or business).

**Elude**—avoid.

**A sea life**—life on board ship.

**Hampton River**—about 20 miles N. E. of Portsmouth.

**Portsmouth**—an important seaport on the south English coast.

**The confinement irksome**—the restriction to the vessel troublesome.

**Perverseness**—contrariness.

**Indisposes us**—makes us dislike.

**Tedium**—weariness; the state of being bored.

**Yacht**—a pleasure sailing-boat.

**Abridgment**—shortening; limiting.

**Noah**—See note to Letter 18.

**Enlarged**—set “at large:” set at liberty.

**The ark**—the great vessel which Noah is said to have built at God’s command, in which to preserve himself and his family during the deluge. (See Bible, *Genesis* 6. 9.-9. 17.) Noah was in the ark, according to the story, about a year, before the flood had sufficiently subsided to allow him to come out.

**Jonah**—See Bible, book of *Jonah*. Jonah, the son of Amittai, a Hebrew prophet, was told by God to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, to preach: but he disobeyed and fled in a ship going to Tarshish (the Western end of the Mediterranean). To stop him, God sent a great storm, and the sailors of the ship, finding that the presence of the disobedient prophet was the cause of their peril, threw him overboard. “And the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly.... And the Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” Then Jonah obeyed God’s first command and went to Nineveh, and proclaimed, ‘yet forty-days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.’ The whole story is probably an allegory of the history of the Jews, who, when they proved unfaithful as God’s chosen people, were



"swallowed up" in the Babylonian captivity, and afterwards restored to their own land, chastened and obedient, by Cyrus.

**Good sloop**—*Sloop*=a small, one-masted sailing vessel. (*Good* is an adjective traditionally applied to a ship: "the good ship.")

**Harriet**—the name of the sloop: called after Cowper's cousin, afterwards Lady Hesketh.

**Mr. Perry**—one of the people of Olney.

**Given over**—despaired of; *i.e.*, his friends gave up all hope of his recovery.

**Pronounced a dead man**, etc.—*i.e.*, the doctor said he was sure to die.

**More angelic**—holier, better morally and religiously: like an angel.

**Illness sanctified**—illness that is made holy by resulting in the moral improvement of the sufferer.

**I know himself**—*i.e.*, Cowper himself.

**Almost these fourteen years**:—In 1763 Cowper suffered his second attack of insanity.

**The worse for it**—poor Cowper thought himself morally and religiously hopeless.

**Mr. Scott**—the curate of Olney, successor of Newton. See Letters and Notes.

**A Sunday School**—five years before this letter was written, Robert Raikes (born 1735, died 1811), a journalist and printer, and an earnest religious man of the evangelical school, had begun to organise Sunday Schools in his town of Gloucester. The idea at first was to provide instruction, secular as well as religious, for poor children, many of whom had to work for their parents all the other days of the week. At first the teachers were paid, but as the institution grew, voluntary teachers were found much more effective. Sunday Schools soon became very popular, and to-day they form a very important part of the

work of all protestant Christian Churches. . The teaching given in them now is entirely moral and religious.

**Mr. Jones**—the Rev. J. Jones, the clergyman at Clifton Reynes, a mile from Olney; the husband of Lady Austen's sister. See Letter 11 and Notes.

**Mr. Unwin**—Rev. William Unwin.

**Wholesome measure**—a morally healthy project.

**To bid fair**—to promise.

**The gospel**—the religion of Jesus Christ : evangelical Christianity.

**What other means**—other, *i. e.*, than the Sunday School.

**Principle**--rule of action : standard of duty.

**Heathenish**—irreligious : immoral : ignorant of true religion.

**Infest**—frequent : crowd.

**Their proper epithet**—a term that would correctly describe them.

**Urchins**—children. (*Urchin*=(1) a hedgehog ; (2) a goblin, imp, little devil ; (3) a child ; boy.

**Diabolically accomplished**--educated, or clever, in wickedness.

**Connivance**—toleration : Latin, *connivere*, to wink at (a fault) : overlook.

**It is well**, etc.—*i. e.*, in many cases the parents actually *teach* their children to be wicked, and we must be thankful if in some cases the children are wicked, not by the actual teaching, but only by the carelessness of their parents.

**Proficiency**—accomplishment in wickedness.

**Any other**—*i. e.*, any other account of the matter : can hardly come to any other conclusion.

**Inveteracy**—‘long continuance’; (Latin, *in*, intensive, and *vetus*, old : *Cf.* *veteran*).

**Mr. Teedon**—Samuel Teedon, the schoolmaster at Olney.

**Expedient**—plan.

**A Christian man**—in later years he had a great religious influence over Cowper.

**Spasmodic**—due to spasm.

## Letter 27.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Oct. 12, 1785.

**Lady Hesketh**—see *Introduction*.

Lady Hesketh was Cowper's cousin, Harriet Cowper, the daughter of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, and sister of Theodora, the lady whom Cowper in early life had wished to marry. Theodora remained faithful to Cowper and never married; Harriet married Sir Thomas Hesketh, (see Letter 36). Partly on account of her loved sister, and partly for her own sake, Cowper was very fond of his cousin Harriet; in an early letter to her, (dated Aug. 9, 1763, he says, "Adieu! my dear cousin. So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened that I was never in love with you." He corresponded with her fairly often in these early days, but the correspondence was broken off before he went to Olney, owing to the influence of Newton. His cousin was a gay, fashionable lady of the world, good-hearted and common-sensed, but with little sympathy with the morbid religious views and strict religious practices that Cowper adopted under Newton's guidance; Cowper's letters to her becoming over-religious, she failed to respond, and the correspondence was broken off for twenty years. The last letter he wrote to her before this one was written from Huntingdon on Oct. 25, 1765. It was the publication of the volume containing the *Task*, and *John Gilpin*, (see Letter 38), that led to the renewal of the correspondence. When she read *John Gilpin*, especially, Lady Hesketh felt that Cowper had escaped from his religious exclusiveness, and she wrote him one of her bright, sunny letters.

This letter is his reply, and its obvious delight shows that his affection for his cousin was as strong as ever. This renewal of friendship was all the more welcome to Cowper, as Lady Austen, whose nature was not unlike that of Lady Hesketh, had left Olney a short time before, and Cowper no doubt missed the cheery presence of one who had inspired the *Task*, and the famous *John Gilpin*. Lady Hesketh, later on, visited Olney, and eventually got Cowper and Mr. Unwin removed from their dreary and unhealthy house to a better one in Weston.

**Franked by my uncle**—countersigned by Mr. Ashley Cowper, a member of parliament, and so allowed to go through the post free.

**That frank**—see Note to Letter 4.

**We are all grown young again, etc.**—*i.e.*, the letter reminded him of the days when he and his cousin had been young together.

**Interrupted intercourse**—see above Note.

**With how much cause**—*i.e.*, he had good reason to value her.

**Same value**—*i.e.*, same sense of value.

**Dormant**—sleeping ; suspended. (Reptiles, etc., that sleep through the winter months are said to be dormant).

**I slander it**—*i.e.*, ‘ I do not do justice to my affection for you’ : ‘ I libel it.’

**It has slept**—*cf.*, ‘ dormant’ ; see above.

**A thousand scenes, in which, etc.**—*i.e.*, incidents in their youth in which they had been sole companions.

**The Arabian Nights' Entertainment**—*i.e.*, they had, when young, read together the famous fairy tales of the East of that name, and laughed together at their incidents.

**A fund of merriment**—a source of amusement.

**Netley Abbey**—near Southampton : see Letter 26 ; probably Cowper is here referring to incidents in his visit to Southampton noted in that letter.

**Upon the field of my remembrance**—*i.e.*, I have in memory lived again in your company in these incidents.

**These few years**—*i.e.*, these last few years.

**This twelvemonth**—*i.e.*, this last year.

**Fear no erasure**—*i.e.*, they are not likely to be rubbed out ; forgotten.

**My poor friend**—Sir Thomas Hesketh. *Poor* is an expression of pity, used because Sir Thomas was dead. He died in 1778, leaving Cowper a small legacy. At the time of Cowper's visit to Southampton, he and Harriet Cowper (Lady Hesketh) were engaged to be married.

**With many peculiarities**—*with*—along with ; accompanying ; besides.

**Sensibilities**—feelings.

**From what quarter**—*i.e.*, from whom ; by what means.

**These twenty years**—since 1765.

**Under Providence**—by God's care : owing to God's care of me.

**In a state of mind**, etc.,—*i.e.*, mentally weak, and at times wholly insane.

**Uncommonly supported**—helped by God in an unusual degree.

**Particularise**—go into details.

**A sable hue**—a dark, melancholy character. (*Sable* = black).

**My uncle's**—Mr. Ashley Cowper, Lady Hesketh's father.

**At so late a day**—*i.e.*, when so old.

**Post-diluvian times**—*i.e.*, times after the Flood : see Notes to Letter 25. He means that in the ante-diluvian times, (before the Flood), men lived to so great an age that it was easily possible to have "the vivacity of youth" even at what would now be considered a great age.

**Apt to outlive**, etc.—*i.e.*, 'liable to lose their love of their parents as they grow older.'

**Survived**—outlived : got beyond.

**Three female descendants**—*viz.*, the three sisters, Harriet (Lady Hesketh), Theodora, and Elizabeth\* (Lady Croft).

**Who leave him, etc.**,—*i.e.*, they are such good daughters that they fully satisfy all he can wish for in his daughters.

**Dejection of spirits, etc.**—*i.e.*, we owe Cowper's poetry to his distressing malady,—religious melancholy, because he took to writing first at Mrs. Unwin's, and then at Lady Austen's advice, to distract his mind from his gloomy thoughts. Cf. Letter 31, and 41.

**Having tried many**—*viz.*, drawing, carpentering, gardening, etc.

**Transcribe**—copy out.

**Attended my brother**—his brother John, who died at Cambridge on Mar. 20th, 1770.

**Nimble in reply**—quick to answer your letters.

## Letter 23.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*Olney, Nov., 9th, 1785.*

In answer to a letter in which Lady Hesketh evidently had expressed a desire to help Cowper financially, and warm admiration of his poetry. In it Cowper mentions his design of translating Homer's *Iliad*.

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 27.

**Run in my head**—been constantly in my thoughts.

**The post will serve me**—will take a letter for me. The post left Olney only twice a week.

**For which you will give me credit**—*i.e.*, believe that I possess it.

**Has suffered its last interruption**—*i.e.*, will not be interrupted again.

**Go down together to the grave**—*i.e.*, remain friends till we die.

**Chirping**—like happy birds.

**Such a scene of things**—such a sad world as this.

**My poems**—*viz.*, those published in his second volume,  
—*The Task*, etc.

**Yours and my uncle's opinion**—*i.e.*, 'your opinion  
and my uncle's (your father's) opinion.'

**I make certain allowances** etc.,—*i.e.*, I take off  
something from the value of your favourable opinion  
because of your affection for me, *i.e.*, you are biassed in  
my favour.

**Relish what you like**—*i.e.*, 'approve of, as literature,  
what pleases your fancy.'

**Drawbacks**—deductions.

**Measure**—amount.

**John Gilpin**—see Notes to Letters 22, etc..

**Since it was he**—see Introductory Note to  
Letter 27.

**To laugh at**—see Letter 25.

**Inestimable**—invaluable : very precious.

**When I was once asked** etc.—After Cowper's re-  
covery from his first attack of madness, in 1765, some of his  
relatives subscribed to make up a small income for him,  
but they grumbled later at Cowper's expenses in keeping  
his old servant and providing for an orphan boy. At this  
time he received an anonymous letter from one "who  
loved him tenderly and approved his conduct," promising  
to make up any deficiency in his income if his relatives  
withdrew their subscriptions. He tried to find out from  
Lady Hesketh who this correspondent was, but he pro-  
bably guessed it was her sister, Theodora.

**Delicately**—tactfully.

**My occasions**—requirements.

**Inconveniences**—financial difficulties.

**Comparatively with**—compared to.

**Consummate**—perfect.

**Trespassing**—going beyond proper limits.

**Yes**—*i.e.*, I accept your kind offer of help.

**You please**—supply : ‘send me the help you offer.’

**Let you a little into**—*i.e.*, ‘inform you to some extent about.’

**More narrowly circumscribed**—more straitened.

**But one purse**—*i.e.*, ‘we have put our incomes together and used them as one for us both.’

**Such things, etc.**—*i.e.*, small luxuries.

**Well-being of life**—happiness.

**My connexions, etc.**—*i.e.*, in a style suited to the rank of my relatives.

**Combined with a better than itself**—*i.e.*, joined with Mrs. Unwin’s larger income.

**At this end of the kingdom**—*i.e.*, the south of England, which was regarded in Cowper’s day as a dearer place to live in than the north.

**Three months**—*viz.*, in 1765.

**By the help of good management, etc.**—said ironically.

**Economical matters**—matters of house-management. (*Economy* = *lit.* house-management : Greek, *oikos*, house, *nomos*, law).

**In possession of the whole case, etc.**—*i.e.*, you know my present financial condition.

**Strain no points**—*i.e.*, do not inconvenience yourself : do not try to assist us beyond what is quite easy to you. (The *points* = laces fastening hose or doublet ; to *strain a point* = *lit.*, to pull at a lace till it breaks ; fasten too tightly).

**Indulge yourself**—give yourself the pleasure.

**Communicating**—sending me.

**My next publication**—his translation of Homer.



**By subscription**—*i.e.*, by collecting the names of intending subscribers, before publication.

**Your vote and interest**—*i.e.*, 'please give me your favour,'—a playful allusion to the request of parliamentary candidates at an election.

**Proposals**—papers inviting people to become subscribers.

**Apprised of it**—informed of it.

**The Iliad**—the famous Greek epic on the siege of Troy (*Ilium*) by the Greeks, attributed to Homer.

**Herculean labour**—labour as great as those of Hercules. Hercules, the Greek demi-god, was famous in mythology for his Twelve Labours, or great feats of strength and skill.

**Pope**—see Note to Letter 10. Pope's Translation of Homer is referred to.

**He has not anticipated me**—*i.e.*, 'Pope's translation of Homer is so different to mine, that it does not in any way make mine unnecessary.' In writing to Newton, Dec. 3. 1785, Cowper says, "Although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner."

**A very smart youth of my years**—*i.e.*, 'I look young and well-preserved for my age.'

**No matter**—*i.e.*, it does not matter: it is of no consequence.

**There was more hair**—*i.e.*, there was plenty of hair from other people's heads, which I could have made into a wig.

**Having found**—*i.e.*, having had a wig made of hair long enough to curl, etc.

**A small bag**—*i.e.*, a small silk pouch fastened to the back of the wig for ornament: such a wig being called a *bag-wig*.

**Away with, etc.—i.e.,** ‘don’t be afraid to write to me too often.’

**View—description:** picture.

**Items—particulars.**

## Letter 29.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*Olney, Feb. 9. 1786.*

**Lady Hesketh—**See Note to Letter 27.

**This tormenting specimen—**Cowper had sent General Cowper a specimen of his translation of Homer (107 lines) which he proposed to have printed in the ‘proposals,’ or circulars which were to be sent round to secure subscribers for the publication of the volume. This “Specimen” was returned to Cowper by Johnson, his publisher, along with some MS. notes by an unknown critic on the lines. This critic afterwards turned out to be Henry Fuseli, the Swiss painter and art critic, who had just come to settle in England from Italy. Cowper was evidently annoyed at these unasked for criticisms.

**The General—**General Cowper, Cowper’s cousin: (see Note to Letter 1).

**A letter—i.e.,** one probably expressing his annoyance at Fuseli’s criticisms.

**Another—i.e.,** one informing him of Johnson’s apology: (see next sentence).

**His friend’s strictures—i.e.,** the criticisms of Fuseli: (see above note).

**A comparison of me, etc.,—i.e.,** notes comparing my translation with the original Greek poem of Homer.

**We shall jog on merrily—i.e.,** we shall get along very well together in our literary work; he refers to himself and Fuseli.

**My prospects—**my favourite views; the scenery of Olney.

**The hovel**—(hut) : see *Task*, I. 221-7.

**The alcove**—(recess : grotto) : see *Task*, I. 278-283.

**The Ouse and its banks**—(the river running near Olney) : see *Task*, I. 163-176.

**Everything that I have described**—*i.e.*, in the *Task*.

**Talk not of an inn!**—*i.e.*, 'Do not speak of staying at an inn in Olney ; you must stay in our house.'

**For your life**—'as you value your life' a playful threat.

**But we could**—'that we could not.'

**Unwin**—see Note to Letter 43.

**My greenhouse**—see Letter 15, and Note.

**Will not be ready**—*i.e.*, it is now full of plants, which cannot be put outside till the warm weather comes.

**Mignonette**—(*Lit.* "little darling") : a garden plant, with an insignificant green flower, but a very sweet scent).

**Bouquet**—nosegay : bunch.

**Imprimis**—in the first place (Latin).

**Vestibule**—hall, or passage, of his house.

**All my hares...Puss**—see Letter 6.

**Promises to die**—'probably will die.'

**Paralytic**—humorously for shaky, rickety, unstable.

**This superb vestibule**—said ironically.

**As happy as the day is long**—*i.e.*, happy all through the day, however long it may last.

**Order yourself...to**—*i.e.*, 'give orders that you shall be delivered at' : Cowper humorously speaks as though his cousin were a parcel.

**The Swan at Newport**—the Swan Inn, at Newport Pagnell, where the coach stopped.

**th ave told Homer, etc.**—*i.e.*, I have consulted in

Homer the original Greek word (*pitios*) which may be translated into English as *cask* or *urn* : and have decided that *cask* is the more correct translation.

The god—Jupiter.

At his taste—*viz.*, in preferring a cask to an urn.

### Letter 30.

### THE LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1786.*

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 27.

**Coz**—an affectionate abbreviation of cousin.

**The Swan**—the inn at Newport Pagnell where the mail coaches stopped, and the letters for Olney were deposited.

**The Padre**—Dr. Gregson, a Roman Catholic priest, and chaplain of Mr. Throckmorton. R. C. priests are addressed as “Father,” which in Portuguese is “padre.”

**Three several times**—*several* = separate, distinct.

**Mrs. Marriott**—the landlady of the “Swan” Inn.

**On Saturdays**—*i.e.*, so that the letters might reach Cowper on Sundays.

**Peepers**—eyes : because by them we ‘peep,’ or see : (a humorous word).

**A great acquisition**—a valuable addition to his property.

**Lameness**—*i.e.*, damaged state of chair-legs.

**Reduce them to a level**—make them level, so that the chair would stand evenly.

**A tea-waiter**—a tea-tray.

**My worship**—‘my honourable self.’

**Disbursements**—expenditures of money.

**My precious**—a term of endearment.

**Charged thee with commissions**—*i.e.*, ‘given thee plenty of pieces of business to do for me.’

**Small matters**—little presents.

**Pack them away to you**—‘pack them (up to send them) away to you.’

**Embargoes**—prohibitions: *i.e.*, ‘do not forbid us to send you small presents.’

**Incorrigible**—lit. ‘incapable of correction’: *i.e.*, ‘whatever you say, we shall continue to send you presents.’

**The bed in which you have laid me**—*i.e.*, ‘the bed in which I sleep is a gift from you!’

**Dismal**—dreary, gloomy.

**Chocolate**—a preparation of cocoa.

**The everything**—*the* is for emphasis here, and repeats the *the* in ‘*the* bed,’ ‘*the* chocolate,’ ‘*the* table,’ just mentioned.

**Giles Gingerbread**—the hero of an old English nurse story; the name adopted playfully by Cowper in his letters to Lady Hesketh, perhaps in reference to some joke of their younger days.

**My glorious ancestry**—some allusion to the old nursery story—Giles Gingerbread’s ancestry.

**Illustrious appellation**—noble name; *viz.*, Giles Gingerbread.

**At my heart**—*i.e.*, ‘with my whole heart.’

**Peppercorn**—*i.e.*, a small acknowledgment.

In some old land tenures, no rent was paid, but a peppercorn (the berry or fruit, of the pepper-plant) was given by the tenant to the landlord in acknowledgment that the land really belonged to the latter. Hence, a merely nominal rent is called a ‘peppercorn rent’; pepper corn here meaning a very small, insignificant sum.

**Brawn**—pickled and pressed boar’s flesh.

**Chine**—a piece of the backbone of an animal (generally the pig), with the adjoining parts, cut for cooking.

**The Welshman**—Mr. William Churchey, attorney-at-law, of Hay, Breconshire: a would-be poet, who had sent Cowper some of his verses for his opinion.

**Weightier matter of the law**—a quotation from Christ's words in the Bible, *Matthew*, 23-23. There "law" means the Mosaic Law, the religious law of the Jews; here, it means judicial law—the legal work of a lawyer. (*Weightier* = more important).

**Appearing in print**—publishing poems.

**Brother bard**—fellow poet.

**The Padre**—Dr. Greyson: see previous note in this letter.

**His function**—his office as a priest.

**Forward**—too ready to take part; prominent.

**Mixed conversation**—either, conversation on matters secular as well as religious; or, conversation in which ladies as well as gentlemen join,—“mixed company” meaning company composed of people of both sexes.

**Transcribed**—copied out.

**The ninth book**—Cowper's translation of the ninth book of Homer's *Iliad*.

**Mrs. Throckmorton**, etc.—she had evidently helped Cowper in making a fair copy of his work for the printer.

**Teedon**—see Note to Letter 26.

**Stuff him**—‘give him plenty to eat.’

**The poor widow**—Mrs. William Unwin, whose husband died on Nov. 29, 1786. See *Introduction*, and Note to Letter 4.

**By a side wind**—indirectly.

**Billy**—Rev. William C. Unwin, her husband, Cowper's great friend. (*Bill* and *Billy* are familiar contractions of William; Cf. ‘Bob,’ for Robert; ‘Jack,’ for John; ‘Ted,’ for Edward; ‘Tom,’ for Thomas, etc).

**Mrs. U.**—Mrs. Unwin, senior.

**Being jointured in her estate**—*i.e.*, having had settled on her a jointure to be paid out of the property of Mrs. Uuwin, senior.

**A jointure**—is property settled on a woman at her marriage, but which cannot be enjoyed till her husband dies.

**From which circumstances, etc.**—*i.e.*, because they would live together on their joint incomes.

**Clapham**—a suburb of London.

**Winchester**—the capital of Hampshire, where there is an ancient cathedral.

**Croydon**—in Surrey : near London.

**Recover the stroke**—get over the shock or blow of her husband's death.

**Henry C.**—Henry Cowper, a cousin of the poet. Cowper addressed a sonnet to him in 1788.

**Not in kind**—*i.e.*, not in the same clever style. 'Kind' = nature ; so—sort, class : *e.g.*, 'what *kind* of animal is this.' 'It is the same *kind* as that.' So—'an answer in kind,' = an answer of the same sort, or nature, as the question. 'To pay *in kind*'—to pay in natural produce or goods instead of in money.

**On epistolary occasions**—*i.e.*, when I have to write letters.

**To shine**—to write brilliantly, cleverly. (This is a hint of how little Cowper ever dreamed that his letters would be published, and that by them he would earn the praise of being "the best of English letter-writers.")

**Since I began**—*i.e.*, to write letters.

**So much the worse for you**—*i.e.*, 'it is a bad thing for you who have to read the letters.'

**The General**—General Cowper : see Note to Letter I.

**Your most Gingerbread Giles**—see previous note.

## Letter 31.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, Nov. 27, 1787.***Lady Hesketh**—See Note to Letter 27.**The part of wisdom**—*i.e.*, the duty of a wise person.**Sit down contented under**—*i.e.*, yield to with a good grace; not rebel against.**Demands of necessity**—things that cannot be helped.**My uncle**—*i.e.*, Mr. Ashley Cowper, Lady Hesketh's father.**Indulge, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'give either yourself or us the pleasure of.'**Causidice mi**—'My counsel' (Latin); 'counsel' meaning lawyer. This was a playful name given to Cowper by Lady Hesketh's husband when he (Cowper was a law-student.**Comfortable abode, etc.**—*i.e.*, Weston Lodge: see Letters June 19, and Aug. 5, 1786.**The half of that time**—during the other half, he was suffering from his malady.**Expatiate**—walk abroad; wander at large. This is the literal meaning of the word; but now it is used only in the metaphorical sense of enlarging upon a subject, or discussing it in detail.**Twenty toes**—*i.e.*, four feet.**You could not reach them**—the places being too rough for a lady's walking.**The flood**—Noah's Flood; the Deluge. See Notes to Letter 18.**Before it**—*i.e.*, before the Flood.**Burnet**—Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), author of *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, a fanciful book.**They might have been seen**—*i.e.*, coach-wheels.**Sam**—Sam Roberts, Cowper's servant.



**Clerk of the parish**—A parish-clerk is a person whose duty it is to lead the responses in the services of the Parish Church.

**All-Saints**—English Churches are generally dedicated to and named after some saint: *e.g.*, St. Thomas's St. Peter's St. Paul's, etc.. Some are dedicated to *all* the Saints, *i.e.*, all the Christian people of saintly life.

**Northampton**—the capital town of the county of Northamptonshire, in the Midlands of England; famous for its boot factories.

**Upholsterer**—a tradesman who supplies beds and other furniture.

**Annex**—attach.

**A bill of mortality**—statement of deaths that have occurred in the Parish.

**A copy of verses**—short poems on the deceased people or reflections on death, etc.

**Statuary**—stone-cutter; one who makes and carves grave-stones, etc.

**Of so much reading**—so learned.

**The compliment**—said ironically, as the parish-clerk seemed to insinuate that Cowper was not so learned as the statuary.

**For the same reason**—*i.e.*, 'because I am learned.'

**Walked over to Weston**—Weston is twelve miles from Northampton.

**My Muse**—my poetic talent.

**My mortified vanity**—'my pride wounded' (by the doubtful 'compliment' referred to above).

**The waggon**—the cart which carried packets too heavy to go by the mail-coach.

**My effusions**—*Effusion* = *lit.* 'a pouring out:' so, a flowing forth or expression of cordial feeling; hence applied, somewhat contemptuously, to prose and poetic writings. Here = poems.

**The mortuary style**—style suitable to the burial of the dead. (Latin, *mortuus*, dead).

**A fig for**, etc.—*i.e.*, ('I would not give) a fig for poets,' etc. A fig, being a very cheap fruit, stands for anything of little or no value.

**Epitaphs**—('writings placed) *on tombs*' from Greek, *epi*, upon, and *taphos* a tomb.

**One**—*i. e.*, one epitaph.

**That serves two hundred persons**—*i.e.*, 'one poem that' celebrates the two hundred deaths recorded in the parish-clerks 'bill of mortality!' (Cowper supplied similar poems in 1788, 1789, 1790, 1791 and 1793).

**Mr. Viz**, a gentleman, etc.—Cowper humorously interprets 'V. I. Z.', the distinguishing marks on this Mr. Mackenzie's papers, as "*viz.*" (Latin *videlicet* = "namely").

**The papers distinguished**, etc.—*viz.*, these of Mr. Mackenzie.

**A sensible man**—reasonable, common-sensed.

**Addison**—see Note to Letter 19. He is referring to the style of Addison's Essays in the *Spectator*.

**The Hall**—Weston Hall, the house of Mr. Throckmorton.

**Vermicelli**—an Italian preparation of flour in the shape of small thread-like rolls or tubes, used to make puddings, etc. An Italian word, from the Latin *vermiculus*, 'a little worm,' from *vermis*, a worm.

**Ladled it about**—stirred it about. (A *ladle* is a large kind of spoon).

**Maggots**—he took the threads and tubes of vermicelli to be worms or maggots.

**Letter 32.**

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, Dec. 10, 1787.*

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 37.

**Snip**—snipping ; small piece ‘snipped,’ or cut off.

**A pattern**—Lady Hesketh sent him a pattern of cloth, advising him to get a coat made from cloth like it.

**The ball**—party, dance ; held at Mrs. Throckmorton’s house.

**Our trim**—our position, our views : *viz.*, that we did not care for balls.

**And why ?**, etc.—the reference is to the *Metrical Version of the Psalms*, by “Sternhold, Hopkins, and others,” published in 1562. These English metrical translations of the Hebrew psalms (see Bible) were sung as hymns in English churches, till they were superseded in 1696 by another version by Tate and Brady. Sternhold and Hopkins often use the rhetorical question “And why ?” or, “For why ?” For example, here are four lines from a version of Psalm 100 ;—

“Praise, laud and bless His name always,  
For it is seemly so to do.  
For why ? The Lord our God is good,  
His mercy is for ever sure ;” etc.

So Cowper here humorously parodies this peculiarity, putting the question and answer into the mouths of Sternhold and Hopkins respectively.

**Fell out**—happened.

**To take any notice**—acknowledge.

**My MSS.**—*viz.*, of his translation of the *Iliad*, sent to Lady Hesketh for her perusal.

**The other good things**—presents from Lady Hesketh.

**Furbished up**—polished. He means he has corrected and improved the translation until the language and style are as good as he can make it.

**Tenth book...eleventh**—*viz.*, of the *Iliad*.

**Notable job**—important task ; *viz.*, his translation.

**The course of a rapid river**—*Cf.*, Cowper’s little poem, written in 1780, and called *A Comparison*, beginning :—

"The lapse of time and rivers is the same,  
Both speed their journey with a restless stream ;" etc.

**Shakespeare says**—No passage like this can be found in Shakespeare. Perhaps Cowper had in his mind a saying of Heraclitus,—“ You cannot go twice into the same rivers.”

**Deuce take**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘ may the devil take,’ etc., (for making such a noise and interrupting me) : a humorous expression of irritation. *Deuce* is probably derived from *Tuss*, a savage goblin in Scandinavian mythology ; then applied to the devil.

### Letter 33.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*Dec. 19, 1787.*

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 27.

**Stationery ware**—materials for writing,—paper, pencils, etc.

**Immortalize**—make famous for ever.

**In red morocco**—bound in red morocco leather.

**Ditto note**—the aforesaid note ; same note (*Ditto* is Italian, contracted from Latin *dictum*, “ said ” : often further contracted into *Do.*)

**Fadge**—an obsolete word : =manage, get on. From ‘ to fit, suit.’ Anglo’ Saxon *foegian*.

**Till Christmas is turned**—*i.e.*, till after Christmas : till Christmas is over.

**To draw upon you**—to ask you for money.

**Anonymous**—*lit.* “ Nameless.” Cowper evidently refers, however, here and elsewhere to some particular person, who gave him an annuity of £50 a year, and other presents. (See Letter 28). Probably this anonymous friend was Lady Hesketh’s sister, Theodora Cowper, whom Cowper had wished to marry.

**Advice**—information of the despatch of.

**Kind present**—*viz.*, the £25 bank-note.

**The drop of ink**—Referring to Cowper's poem called "*Ode to Apollo: on an ink-glass almost dried in the sun.*"

**It is possible, etc.**—Cowper probably knew his nameless correspondent was Theodora, and so he takes this delicate, roundabout way of thanking her through her sister, Lady Hesketh.

**Snipping my ears, etc.**—Probably a foolish remedy for toothache, prescribed in those days when medicine was often mixed up with unscientific and ridiculous superstitions. (*Lady Strange, unknown*).

**Chirurgical**—surgical. 'Surgical' is a contracted form; the word being derived from the Greek *cheiourgōs*, "working with the hand," from *cheir*, a hand.

**The manner of it**—i.e., 'the way in which my toothache was removed; the manner of the operation I performed myself.'

**The Hall**—Weston Hall, the seat of Mr. Throckmorton.

**Refuse its own office, etc.**—i.e., 'lest I should not be able to eat with the aching tooth, on account of the pain.'

**Dislocation**—i.e., he twisted the loose tooth in eating; put it out of place.

**Meet**—find, produce.

**Dexterously**—skilfully: (from Latin *dexter*, the right hand).

**Twitch**—pull.

**Rowley**—Clotworthy Rowley: a companion of Cowper's when he was studying law at the Temple, with whom he had corresponded in early life. As in the case of many of his early friends, the correspondence was dropped for many years. It was renewed in 1787, when Rowley, who was then living in Dublin, returned some books which Cowper had lent him twenty-five years before. Rowley came from Tending Hall, near Stoke-by-Nayland.

**Another in Scotland**—Samuel Rose. 'He was the son of Dr. William Rose, a schoolmaster at Chiswick. On his way from Glasgow University to London in 1787, he turned aside on purpose to visit Cowper, whose poems he admired, on January 18th. A warm friendship sprang up between the two men, which lasted till Cowper's death in 1800. Rose himself died a few years later in 1804, at 38 years of age. Rose gave Cowper a copy of the poems of Burns, who was then becoming famous, with which Cowper was much delighted. Cowper stood godfather to one of Rose's children, and stayed at his house in London when returning from Earham 1792.

**A third in Wales**—see Note on "the Welshman" to Letter 30.

**Diverting**—amusing.

**My dog**—A spaniel given to Cowper by the two Misses Gunning, daughters of Robert Gunning, a neighbour. It was called Beau: and Cowper wrote three poems referring to it,—“The Dog and the Water-lily,” “On a Spaniel, called Beau, on killing a young bird,” and “Beau's reply.” (*Spaniel* = *lit.* ‘a little Spanish dog’: it is a name given to several breeds of dog, especially used for sporting purposes).

**Chiune corner**—close to the fire.

**Embers**—hot ashes.

**Personal endowment**—good looks.

**The post comes daily**—whereas before it came only twice a week.

**Throcks**—familiar contraction for Throckmortons.

**Invited us to the measure**—‘proposed that we should join them in this arrangement.

**Stumping**—walking; trudging on one's ‘stumps,’ (a slang term for ‘feet’).

**Closes**—passages, courts: *enclosed* places.

**Mr. Throck, etc.**—*i.e.*, Mr. John Throckmorton, Mrs.

Throckmorton, and Mr. George Throckmorton, (brother to John).

**Ealf-boots**—In Cowper's day, "boots" meant riding-boots up to the knee; "half-boots," were boots up to the ankle, like modern boots.

**Her own figure**—her appearance, all muddy.

**Transcribed, etc.**—*i.e.*, made a fair copy of, etc.

## Letter 34.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, March 3, 1788.*

A graphic account of a fox-hunt; an example of Cowper's descriptive power.

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 27.

**The wilderness**—part of the grounds of Mr. Throckmorton.

**The cry of hounds**—the baying or barking of a pack of fox-hounds.

**Elm**—one of the commonest and largest of English trees.

**Yelping**—barking.

**Terrier**—A breed of small dog used for pursuing rabbits, etc., into their burrows or holes; *lit.* a burrow-dog'; from Law Latin *terrarium*, a hillock, burrow: from Latin *terra*, earth.

**Cavalcade**—body of horsemen: the huntsmen. (From Latin *caballus*, a horse).

**The huntsman**—the man in special charge the hounds.

**Killed him**—*i.e.*, the fox.

**Sagacity**—intelligence; skill in finding the trail of the fox. (Fox-hounds hunt by scent).

**The slaughtered prey**—the fox, killed by the dogs.

**Reynard**—(also written *renard*): the fox. The word means literally "strong-in-counsel," (from Old German

*Reinhard*, or *Reinhart*), and was the name given to the fox in the mediæval romance, "Reincko Fuchs," or "Reynard the Fox," to indicate the fox's proverbial cunning.

**A ceremony**—*viz.*, the end of the fox-hunt.

**Pitchfork**—a *fork* used for *pitching* or tossing the long grass in the sun to turn it into hay.

**Not less expressive, etc.**—*i.e.*, manifesting the same amount of intelligent pleasure, etc.

**Bolus**—pill: (*i.e.*, swallowed it whole, without chewing it).

**To open a lane**—to stand back on either side.

**Screaming like a friend**—shouting out in a wild and savage way.

**The pack**—*viz.*, of dogs.

**As Virgil says**—See *Æneid*, IX. 6. 7: "*Turne, quod optanti divum promittere nemo Auleret, volvenda dies en attulit ultro.*"—*i.e.*, "Turnus, what none of the gods would have dared to promise in answer to our desires, time in its course has brought of its own accord."

**What, etc.**—*viz.*, the sight of this ceremony at the end of a fox-hunt.

**In at the death**—A technical phrase for being present at the end of a hunt; used properly only of a huntsman who has all the way kept up with the hounds.

## Letter 35.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, July, 28, 1788.*

**Lady Hesketh**—See Note to Letter 27.

**No talent at description**—no skill in describing things.

**By way of map**—as a map, or guide.

**Your paradise**—your beautiful neighbourhood.

**Paradise** = *lit.*, a garden: from the Persian *firdaus* (plur. *farâdis*). In English it means, (1) a garden, or



beautiful piece of country: (2) The Garden of Eden, the residence of our first parents, Adam and Eve; (3) Heaven.

**The lime-walk**—an avenue of lime trees in Mr. Throckmorton's grounds; described in the *Task*, I. 338-349.

**Wood-bill**—an axe or knife for cutting branches.

**Intercepted the arch**—interfered with the formation of a well-defined arch by the interlacing boughs of the trees in the avenue.

**No cathedral**—The nave of a Gothic cathedral, with its rows of pillars, and its arched roof supported by stone "branches" springing from the pillars, looks very like an avenue of noble trees. Cf. Tennyson, *Palace of Art*, "Cloisters, branched like mighty woods."

**Object of taste**—beautiful sight.

**Such a gloom**—the shade of the green leaves.

**Improvers of parks, etc.**—Cowper refers to the debased taste of the landscape-gardeners of his time, who laid gardens and grounds out in circles and curves.

**Rectilinear**—'in a straight line.'

**Quarrel with the sunbeams**—because they come in straight lines from the sun.

**The account**—*Characters of 500 Authors of Great Britain now living*, by W. Marshall. London, 1788.

**High crime and misdemeanour**—'Serious crime and offence.'

**Neglecting method**—Referring to the *Task* which Cowper confessed "cannot boast a regular plan." See Letters Oct. 10 and Dec. 11. 1784.

**Didactic**—teaching: poetry which aims at inculcating some philosophy, or system of truth.

**A logical precision**—an exact arrangement of subject-matter according to the rules of logic.

**There is no pleasing**—*i.e.*, there is no (way of) pleasing.

**Prodigies**—(literary) wonders : (spoken playfully).

**For aught I know**—*i.e.*, for anything I know (to the contrary) : as far as I am aware.

**My confraternity**—my brother writers.

**Amen!**—*lit.*, 'May it be so!'

**Coz**—contraction for 'cousin.'

**Owned fee simple**—had absolute ownership: full legal possession. Land held in fee-simple is free hold property. A rector has only the use of the house and land provided, during the term of his life.

**Emoluments**—rewards.

**For poets**—Because poets are proverbially poor.

**Strawberry Hill**—in London, where Lady Hesketh lived.

## Letter 36.

TO MRS. KING.

*Weston Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.*

This letter should be compared with Letter 5 for, like it, it gives an account of the occupations or hobbies which Cowper engaged in to divert his mind from his distressing melancholy.

**Mrs. King**—The wife of the Rev. John King, Rector of Pertenhall, in Cambridgeshire. She had known Cowper's brother John; and when she read the *Task*, she wrote to Cowper in February, 1788, and sent him some of his brother's unpublished poems. Cowper was very pleased, and wrote several interesting letters to her. She and her husband visited Cowper at Weston in 1790. She died in 1793.

**Superfluity**—'being poor, he has nothing to spare but copies of his own poems.'

**I commenced writer**—*i.e.* 'I began to employ myself as an author': 'began to write.' (*Cf.* 'commences his own judge,' in Letter 4.)

**A way somewhat similar to yours**—Mrs. King evidently employed herself in sewing or dress-making: (see ‘scissors and needle,’ below).

**Masculine and female operation**—A woman naturally turns to sewing; a man to such occupations as carpentering.

**The chisel and saw**—to become acquainted with the works of a carpenter. *Cf.* Letter Jan. 16, 1786.

**A too plentiful return**—*i.e.*, ‘I might have sent you more furniture, etc., which I had made, than you would have wanted.’

**Tables such as they were**—*i.e.*, ‘such tables as I was able to make.’

**Joint-stools**—*i.e.*, ‘joined-stools’: stools the parts of which were inserted into each other.

**Such as never were**—He means the joint-stools he made were unlike any ever made before: playfully hinting at his imperfect carpentering.

**To Pertenhall**—where Mrs. King lived (See note above).

**Many others**—see Letter Jan. 16, 1786.

**Dint**—force.

**‘Squire**—now usually written ‘Squire,’ without the apostrophe: a contraction of ‘Esquire,’ which is still used as a title of respect placed after a name. An esquire was originally an attendant on a knight: from Latin *Scutarius*, a shield—(Latin, *scutum*)—bearer. Then it was the title of a definite rank, *viz.*, of one just below a knight. Now-a-days it is used, (1) (in its contracted form of ‘squire’) for a country gentleman, or landlord: and (2) (in its full form of ‘esquire’) as a title more respectful than ‘Mr..’

**Squirrel-houses**—huts, or cages, for squirrels.

**Hutches**—hutch is akin to “hut”: a box, or chest.

**In the article of**—as regards; respecting.

**Cabbage-nets**—nets for protecting cabbagés, etc. from birds.

**Hardiness**—boldness, audacity.

**Take in hand the pencil**—learn drawing. See Letter 5.

**Figures**—drawings.

**Unparalleled, etc.**—*i.e.*, ‘they were unlike any other pictures and any natural objects’: (playfully depreciating his attainments).

**Three landscapes**—these three pictures still exist. An engraving of one of them was published in “The Gentleman’s Magazine” for June, 1804. The “lady” referred to was Lady Austen. (*Landscape* = a picture of a view, or natural scene: *lit.* = *land-shape*, from Dutch *landschaps*).

**Glazed**—placed in a frame behind *glass*.

**I then judged, etc.**—said humorously. The real reason he gave up drawing was because he found it injured his eyesight: see Letter Jan. 16, 1786.

**Gardening**—see Letter 1, and Notes.

**Cucumbers**—see *Task*, III. 346—543.

**Myrtles**—see Letter 15: and *Task*, III. 570.

**Attendance**—attention.

**A fire heat**—*i.e.*, kept them in a frame or miniature-green-house, artificially heated.

**Latest possible puff**—*i.e.*, to blow up the fire as late as possible, so that it might last through the night.

**Nursing**—carefully cultivating. (Hence a garden where young plants are reared, is called a “nursery garden.”)

**A greenhouse**—see Letter 15, and Notes.

**Verse excepted**—except the composition of poetry.

**I left Olney for Weston**—see Letter to Newton, Aug. 5, 1786.

**A neighbour’s garden**—*viz.*, Mr. Throckmorton’s.

**Letter 37.**

TO SAMUEL ROSE ESQ.,

*Weston, Aug. 8, 1789.***Samuel Rose**—see Notes to Letters 37.

**You cannot come at a wrong time**—i.e., ‘you will be welcome whenever you come.’

**Evening reading**—see Letter 1, and note.

**Mr. Piozzi's Gravels**—‘*A Journey through France, Italy, and Germany.*’ The authoress was Mrs. Thrale, the friend of Dr. Johnson, who figures largely in Boswell's “*Life of Johnson.*” After Mr. Thrale's death, she married, in 1781, Piozzi, an Italian music-master.

**Book-makers**—authors. (The word now-a-days generally means men who make it a profession to take and arrange for bets).

**Fastidious judge**—over-particular critic.

**There goes more to**, etc.—i.e., ‘it takes much more ability, experience, thought, etc., to write a book,’ etc.

**Same poet**—Pope.

**Dunciad**—see Note to Letter 10.

**The mercy**, etc.—From Pope's *Universal Prayer*. The lines are a paraphrase of the words in the Lord's Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” Cowper means that this was a strange prayer for Pope to pray because in his satire, the *Dunciad*, he had shewn no mercy at all to other poets.

**Alas! for Pope**, etc.—i.e., ‘Pope would be in an unhappy condition if he received the same treatment he measured out to his fellow poets in the *Dunciad.*’ (*Alas for governs Pope*, and should be written, *Alas for Pope!* i.e., ‘It would be a bad thing for Pope.’)

**Scratch**—write (hurriedly).

**Noddle**—head: a playful word: (akin to *knot*—and refers especially to the protuberant back part of the head).

**Letter 38.**

TO MRS. BODHAM.

*Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.*

A letter which well illustrates the deeply affectionate nature of Cowper, whose memory of the mother he lost when only a child of six, was so vivid: and interesting, as describing the incident which led to his writing his poem on "My Mother's Picture."

**Mrs. Bodham**—Ann Bodham was the wife of the Rev. Thomas Bodham, Rector of Matishall, in Norfolk. She was a Donne, a member of Cowper's mother's family, being the daughter of an uncle of Cowper, the Rev Roger Donne, Rector of Catfield, in Norfolk. She was therefore Cowper's first cousin, and had been a playfellow of his in their childhood. Their friendship was renewed at this time through her nephew, John Johnson, who in January, 1790, visited Cowper at Weston, and gave a glowing account of him to his aunt, Mrs. Bodham, who wrote to Cowper and sent him his mother's portrait.

**My dearest Rose**—Rose was the name Cowper gave to her; her real name was Ann.

**Withered, etc.**—*i.e.*, dead: like a faded flower, in allusion to her name, *Rose*.

**Know it**—*viz.*, 'that you are alive.'

**Jot**—'the smallest amount.' *jot*=Greek *iota* (the letter "i"), and the Hebrew *yod* (the letter "y"), the smallest letter of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets.

**Affinity**—relationship.

**The picture**—the portrait of his mother. It is a miniature in oils by Heines, a German artist who lived in Norwich.

**Trepidation**—trembling excitement.

**The dear original**—his mother.

**An ocular witness**—eye-witness: one who can bear direct testimony.

**Fidelity of the copy**—the faithful likeness of the portrait to his mother.

**Maternal tenderness**—expression of motherly love.

See his poem "*On the receipt of My Mother's picture out of Norfolk.*"

"Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,  
That thou mightst know me safe and warmly laid ;  
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,  
The biscuit or confectionery plum ;  
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestowed  
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glowed ;" etc.

**More of the Donne**—*i.e.*, 'Inherit more from my mother than my father.' His mother was a Miss Donne : See *Introduction*.

**All of both names**—all the members of both the Cowper and Donne families.

**Those of my own name**—members of the Cowper family, his father's side.

**Your side**—his mother's side, the Donne family.

**Can trace**—'can detect the influence, or character of.'

**Somewhat, etc.**—*i.e.*, '(I have) somewhat,' etc.

**Here:**—His modesty makes him hesitate to fill in the word, but he eventually explains that he means *good nature*.

**Speaking to you**—*i.e.*, '*you* will understand that I don't say this out of conceit.'

**Our venerable ancestor**—Dr. John Donne, who lived 1573—1631. He was a noted theologian and preacher, and was made Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1621. He was a poet of considerable genius, though his style was very peculiar. His crabbed, passionate, metaphysical poems had a great influence in determining the change in English poetry under the Stuarts from the directness of the Elizabethan age.

**A Donne at all points**—*i.e.*, 'in all parts of my nature a member of the Donne family.'

**The dear boy, your nephew**—John Johnson : see Note to Letter 39.

**Invitation**—to visit her.

**Answer to**—*i.e.*, your visiting us will be as agreeable us as our visiting you (*Answer to*=(here) “*suit.*”)

**Crazed**—*lit.* mad : vexed, or troubled.

**Hewitt, etc.**—names of daughters of the Rev. Roger Donne, father of Mr. Bodham. Their names were,—Elizabeth (Mrs. Hewitt), Catherine (Mrs. John Johnson), Harriet (Mrs. Balls), and Ann (Mr. Bodham).

**Catfield**—the residence of his uncle, Roger Donne.

**The parsonage**—the house where the Rector, Roger Donne, lived (*parsonage* = house of the parish clergyman, or parson).

**Kindness to my Homer**—‘kind appreciation of my translation of Homer.’

**Castres**—The Rev. Castres Donne, who was vicar of Ludham.

**Into the bargain**—as well ; besides.

**His sister**—Catherine Johnson.

## Letter 39.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

*Weston, March 23, 1790.*

**John Johnson**—the nephew of Mrs. Bodham (see Letter 38), being the son of her sister, Catherine, who married Mr. John Johnson of Ludham. He was a student of Caius College, Cambridge, when, in Jan. 1790, he visited Cowper at Weston. This visit brought Cowper again into touch with his mother’s relations, of whom he had heard nothing since childhood, and so caused him great pleasure. He took a great fancy to young Johnson, then only twenty years of age, and the letters he wrote to him afterwards are full of sympathy with the young undergraduate’s love of fun, and of good advice concerning his preparation for the Church. Johnson became a clergyman. He died in 1833.

**Your MSS.**—the copies which Johnson had made of Cowper’s translation of Homer.



**New Norfolk Street**—the street in London where Lady Hesketh lived.

**Your labours**—in copying.

**Amanuensis**—copyist.

**Mr. George Throckmorton**—brother of Mr. John Throckmorton, see Letters 48.

**A man to be envied**—*i.e.*, because you still have before you the pleasure of reading it.

**The Odyssey**—the second great epic of Homer: the story of the wanderings of Ulysses (or Odysseus), king of Ithaca, returning from the Trojan war.

**Longinus**—a Greek critic and philosopher of the 3rd century, who depreciated the *Odyssey* as compared with the *Iliad*.

**Meridian**—the sun at its highest point in the sky at noon. (He compared the *Iliad* to the sun at mid-day, and the *Odyssey* to the setting sun).

**Just**—correct; true fair.

**The prettiness of it, etc.**—*i.e.*, 'he was led away from fair criticism by the neatness of the simile.'

**The latter**—the *Odyssey*.

**Written.....composed**—This refers to the controversy as to whether Homer was one poet, or the editor and compiler of many traditional poetic fragments, or the name standing for many forgotten bards whose poems joined together make the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

**That snarling generation**—'that carping body of critics.' (Just as the Higher Critics shew, by historical and literary proofs, that the Mosaic books of the Bible are due to composite authorship and could not have been written by Moses, so these literary critics tried to shew that "Homer's" works were not the work of one poet, but the gathered fragments of many different hands).

**Shred**—lit. part: *i.e.*, 'you belong to my mother's side of the family.'

**Fall into**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘Get into the same condition.’ (*Predicament*, from Latin *prædico*, to declare:=(1) in Logic, one of the comprehensive heads or terms under which all other terms can be arranged; (2) class, or condition; (3) specially, a dangerous or awkward situation).

**Your personal right to be loved**—*i.e.*, ‘we say we love you, not for any loveable qualities in you yourself, but for other reasons.’

**There is nothing**—*i.e.*, ‘I am very careful not to say anything to increase a young man’s vanity, knowing how easily this vanity is excited by praise.’ (He humorously gives this as a reason for attributing his affection for Johnson to other reasons than Johnson’s own loveable qualities).

**Touch with so much tenderness**—‘treat very gently’: ‘avoid ministering to.’

**In that particular part**—his vanity.

**Coxcomb**—*Cock’s comb* conceited fellow

**Valued**—esteemed.

**Puzzle not**, etc. —*i.e.*, ‘don’t think you must not write to us because you can’t think of any special subject to write about: write, whether you have a subject or not.’

**Letter 40.**

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON.

*The Lodge, May, 10, 1790.*

**Mrs. Throckmorton**—the wife of Mr. John Courtenay Throckmorton, who lived in Weston Hall, at Weston Underwood. He was the son of Sir Robert Throckmorton, and succeeded to the baronetcy when his father died in 1791, he becoming Sir John, and his wife Lady, Throckmorton. They were Roman Catholics, and so were very unpopular with the bigoted Protestants of Weston and Olney. Cowper, however, became very friendly with them, and called them affectionately “Mr. and Mrs. Frog.” Parts of their grounds, such as the Wilderness and the Lime Walk, are described in the *Task*; and many of

Cowper's smaller poems are on incidents connected with them. The house he lived in at Weston, Weston Lodge, was their property.

**Mrs. Frog**—Cowper's playful contraction of "Throckmorton." In Letter 33, he similarly calls them both "the Throcks."

**The Doctor**—perhaps Dr. Gregson, the Roman Catholic chaplain of the Throckmortons: See Letter 30.

**Desired**—requested.

**Urchin**—from Latin, *ericius*, a hedgehog. It means (1) a hedgehog; (2) a goblin; (3) a small boy,—perhaps because small boys are often mischievous, like goblins or imps.

**Bucklands**—in Berkshire, the family seat of the Throckmortons. Cowper's friend left Weston and went to live at Bucklands on the death of the old baronet in 1791.

**Charged**—entrusted.

**Divers**—various: (same as *diverse*).

**Stands acquitted**—'is guiltless of neglecting to write' *i.e.*, 'he has written.'

**The last antecedent**—*i.e.*, the Doctor was the last mentioned.

**Plough-team**—the horses which draw a plough.

**Heaven knows!**—*i.e.*, 'God alone knows: I don't:' a common way of expressing ignorance of a fact.

**Presented themselves**—*viz.*, 'to my notice; so, 'come under my observation.'

**Infested**—haunted, frequented.

**Your wilderness**—see Note to Letter 25.

**Carnations**—the name of several kinds of pinks, a species of garden flower.

**The said last antecedent**—see above note.

**Mastiff**—a variety of dog of old English breed. It is a large dog, very strong, with a massive head, big ears, heavy jaw and deep, pendulous lips.

**Attorney**—a lawyer, to threaten him with legal proceedings.

**Sally**—*lit.*, to leap; (Latin *salire*): to go forth. Specially used of an attack by a besieged garrison on the besiegers, or of a knight-errant starting forth from his castle on adventures.

**Don Quixote**—the hero of the famous romance of that name, by Cervantes, the great Spanish author. The book was written as a satire on the ridiculous romances of chivalry. Don (a Spanish title = lord, Sir) Quixote was a poor country gentleman whose brain was turned by reading romances about knights and giants and monsters, and who rode out like a knight-errant to find monsters to kill and fair damsels to rescue. The book consists of his absurd doings and ridiculous adventures.

**Who mean**—who means.

**The fox hunters**—*Cf.* his satiric sketches in *Progress of Error*, 82-183, and *Task*, VI., 425-438.

**The two universities**—Oxford and Cambridge. see Letters 22 and 24: and *Tirocinium*, 240-246.

**The Turnpike Bill**—a Bill in Parliament for abolishing certain turnpikes. A *turnpike* is a toll-gate, or gate placed across a road to stop travellers until they have paid the toll or tax for using the road. The toll-gate was called a turnpike because it superseded a *turn-stile*, which consisted of four horizontal arms or *pikes* which *turned*, or revolved, on the top of a post, to let passengers pass through. *Turnpikes* are done away with in England now, but the name for a main road (a "turnpike road"), and many of the old toll-gate lodges, or houses where the turnpike men lived, still survive.

**Alive or dead**—*i.e.*, still progressing in the House of Commons, and likely to pass or be defeated and rejected.

**Ignoramus**—'ignorant people.' *Ignoramus*, Latin for 'we are ignorant,' 'we do not know,' was a legal term written on bills of indictment when the evidence was considered insufficient to make them good.

## Letter 41.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, May 28, 1790.***Lady Hesketh**—see Letter 27.**Coz**—contraction of 'cousin.'

**This occasion**—*viz.*, the appointment of a Poet Laureate in succession to Thomas Warton, who died in this year. Lady Hesketh was anxious that Cowper should be appointed, and had persuaded him to write some loyal verses on the recovery of George III. from his temporary madness. However, as this letter shows, Cowper did not at all desire it. Eventually Pye received the post. (*Laureate*=crowned with a laurel wreath, like the ancient Greek poets, who were reckoned victors in the poetry competitions: so Poet Laureate=the chief poet). The title was given to a poet appointed by the king, and carried a small salary with it. The Poet Laureate was supposed to write poems on national events and loyal verses in praise of the king.

**Heaven guard my brows**—*i.e.*, 'God forbid I should have to wear': *i.e.*, may I never be Poet Laureate.'

**The wreath**—the laurel wreath of the court poet. The laurel was sacred to Apollo, the Greek god of poetry and music.

**Whatever wreath**, etc.—'whatever other honours I may win.'

**A leaden extinguisher clapped**, etc.—*i.e.*, it would so oppress me as to paralyse my poetic gift.' (*Extinguisher*=a metal cap placed over a candle to put it out. *Clapped*=put over: so, 'It would smother my poetic genius as an extinguisher puts out the light of a candle').

**A line**—*i.e.*, of poetry.

**To wear it**—*i.e.*, to be Poet Laureate.

**In Homer-hurry**—*i.e.*, 'in haste caused by the necessity of finishing my translation of Homer.'

## Letter 42.

TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

*Weston, July 31, 1790.***John Johnson**—see Note to Letter 39.**A scatter-brain**—‘a careless fellow’: one whose thoughts are *scattered*, *i.e.*, not arranged in an orderly way.**Insuperable shyness**—see Letter 28 and Notes.**Concerned**—troubled.**As a dream**, etc.—see Bible, Psalms 73. 20, and 90. 4.**It is a life**, etc.—*i.e.*, human life, or our life, is a life, etc.**Employment**—*viz.*, in making fair copies of his translation.**A foul one**—*i.e.*, he had made many alterations in the fair copy.**Spare nothing**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘alter everything that can be improved by alteration.’**Donne’s poems**—poems of Dr. Donne, Dean of St. Paul’s: see Note to Letter 38.**Two fiddles**—violins. (Young Johnson played the violin).**Terrible performers**—very bad violinists.

## Letter 43.

TO MR. JOHNSON (Printer).

Interesting as an illustration of the annoyances Cowper had to endure in the printing of his poems. See also Letter 8.

**Johnson**—Cowper’s publisher. See Letter 7, and Note.**Tampered with**—meddled with: altered by some interfering person.**Annihilated**—*lit.*, ‘reduced to nothing’ (Latin, *nihil*, *nil*): spoilt.**Delicate**—fastidious: over-particular. See Letter March 20, 1786, and *cf.* his lines in *Table-Talk*, 510-513:—

“ Modern taste  
 “ Is so refined, and delicate, and chaste  
 That verse, whatever fire the fancy warms,  
 Without a creamy smoothness has no charms.”

**Squeamishness**—‘ excessive niceness in taste .  
*squeamish* means *lit.* “ having a stomach that is easily  
 upset, or a very delicate digestion.”

**Quicksilver**—mercury.

**Serves a poem**, etc.—*i.e.*, ‘ he takes all the force and  
 energy out of a poem by over-refinement of language and  
 metre.’

**Pope**, etc.—see Note to Letter 11. Pope’s metre is so  
 regular and his style so scrupulously exact as to make it  
 almost impossible to imitate him without becoming mo-  
 notonous and tame.

**Compactness of his expression**—terse, compressed  
 style.

**Smoothness of his numbers**—even regularity of  
 rhythm.

**Drop the imitation**—give up trying to write like  
 him.

**To emasculate**—‘ to deprive of vigour.’ (*Lit.*, to cas-  
 trate, or geld; deprive of the properties of a male: from  
 Latin *e*, privative, and *masculus*, male).

**Give me**—*i.e.*, ‘ I prefer.’

**Musical periods**—‘ sweet-sounding sentences.’

**Oily smoothness**—*Cf.* “smooth as quicksilver,” above:  
 and “creamy smoothness” in the quotation in the note  
 on “delicate,” above.

**Longer poem**—the translation of the *Iliad*.

**Our common friend**—*viz.*, Lady Hesketh. (Common  
 friend,” meaning a friend common to two or more people,  
 is a more correct expression than the modern “mutual  
 friend.”)

**An ear so nice**—‘ a literary or poetic taste so fastidious.’

**They cannot be made smoother**—See Cowper’s re-

marks on Milton's intentional roughnesses in Letter March 20, 1786

**Roughness on a plum**—the bloom—a gummy secretion which covers the ripe fruit, and gives it a beautiful greyish-purple hue.

**All such meddling**—alteration of his poems by officious printers.

**Sacrifice the spirit**, etc.—*Of*. his lines in *Table-Talk*, 514-517 :—

“Thus, all success depending on an ear,  
And thinking I might purchase it too dear,  
If sentiment were sacrificed to sound,  
And truth cut short to make a period round,” etc.

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#### Letter 44. TO THE REV. MR. BUCHANAN.

*Weston, May 11, 1791.*

Interesting as giving the origin of one of Cowper's (unfinished) poems, *The Four Ages*.

**Buchanan**—the Rev. John Buchanan, curate of Ravenstone and Weston Underwood, who lived close to Weston Lodge, Cowper's house. He had sent Cowper a suggestion for a poem, and had sketched out the subject for him.

**A beautiful poem**—*i.e.*, a sketch of matter capable of being made into a beautiful poem.

The subject Buchanan suggested was the four divisions of human life—infancy, youth, manhood, and old age.

**I would to Heaven**—*i.e.*, ‘I very much wish’: *lit.* I pray to God that.’

**That requisite**—*viz.*, metre.

**I will**—Cowper began the poem, *The Four Ages*, but never finished it.

**Share**—*viz.*, of ability.

**Little messenger**—the boy who brought the letter.



## Letter 45.

TO LADY HESKETH.

*The Lodge, July 11. 1791.*

This letter contains a reference to the beginning of the French Revolution.

**Lady Hesketh**—See Note to Letter 27.

**Draft**—an order authorising a person to *draw* a certain sum of money. (*Draft* is another spelling of *draught*, which = the acting of *drawing*: from *draw*, drag).

**Negotiated**—cashd. To “negociate a draft” is to get it exchanged for money, or cashed.

**Draw yet again**—*i.e.*, ask her for more financial help: obtain another draft from her.

**A purse at Johnson's**—*i.e.*, money owing to him by Johnson, his publisher.

**Recur**—resort to: *lit.* ‘run again to.’

**Loose cash**—money available for spending.

**That dealer in authors**—Johnson, the publisher: a humorous phrase, meaning one who deals in (buys and sells) authors, as a trader deals in goods.

**Pay me with my own money**, etc.—Johnson offered first to publish Cowper's *Homer* for nothing and take all the proceeds of the sale of the book himself to cover the expenses of publishing: *i.e.*, to give Cowper nothing.

**My copy**—my MS., my translation. (*Copy* is a technical phrase for matter fit for publication: *e.g.* “newspaper copy”).

**Hurt**—grieved.

**Below par**—‘below the ordinary level.’ “At par” “below par,” “above par” (Latin *par*, equal) are business phrases. Shares are said to be “at par” when they are selling at their original price: “below par,” when their value has gone down and they are sell below their original price; “above par,” when their value has gone up. For example, if a Rs. 15 share sells for Rs. 15, it is “at par”:

if it sells at Rs. 12, it is "below par"; if it sells at Rs. 16, it is "above par."

**Recover themselves**—rise again.

**Copyright**—the exclusive right to publish a book.

**Closed**—agreed; accepted.

**Mr. Rose**—See Note to Letter 37.

**Clench**—ratify; finally settle. To *clench* or *clinch* a nail is to hammer the end back after driving it through a piece of wood, so as to fix it firmly in.

**Josephus**—Mr. Joseph Hill: see Note to Letter 2.

**Apprehend**—understand: am of opinion.

**The expenses of the press**—cost of printing.

**Grudge**—give reluctantly; not wish one to have.

**Sephus**—contraction of Josephus: Mr. Joseph Hill.

**Signing the seven hundred copies**—*i.e.*, for Cowper to write his signature on each copy of the book, so that Johnson could not cheat him by selling more than the number arranged, and keeping the proceeds of these extra volumes for himself.

**Calling Johnson a knave**, etc.—*i.e.*, 'it would be the same as telling Johnson he was dishonest and could not be trusted.'

**Take my chance**—*i.e.*, 'run the risk of being cheated by the publisher.'

**The King and Queen of France**—on June 21, 1791, King Louis XVI. and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, were arrested at Varenne when attempting to flee from Paris, and brought back by the Revolutionists. (This hint reminds us that Cowper was living his peaceful, retired life at Weston at the very time the terrible French Revolution was raging in Paris).

**Melancholy circumstances**—King George III. became temporarily insane in Oct. 1788. The Prince of Wales, (afterwards George IV.), who was on bad terms with his mother, Queen Sophia, claimed "the inherent right" of

being appointed Regent, being supported by Fox and opposed by Pitt.

**Prisoners.....for life**—their lives did not last long. Louis XVI. was executed Jan. 21. 1793, and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, in October of the same year.

**Scurvily**—meanly; badly.

**The establishment**—establishing, settling.

**Our guests**—*viz.*, John Johnson, his sister Catherine, and their aunt, Mrs. Balls. (See Notes to Letters 38 and 42). They had visited Cowper at Weston, and it had been arranged that they should take a house and settle down there.

**Any impediment, etc.**—writing to Lady Hesketh, on June 23rd of this year, Cowper had said that the above arrangement would be made “if Aunt Bodham, who is most affectionately attached to them all, can be persuaded not to break her heart about it.”

**Disinterestedness**—unselfishness.

**The Mediterranean hint**—the suggestion that he should write a poem on the Mediterranean Sea.

**No proportion, etc.**—*i.e.*, ‘the theme (subject) would be beyond my powers.’

**Bouillie's letter**—Francois Claude Armour, Marquis de Bouillie (1739—1800), was a French General. He was commander of the army of the Mense in 1790. In 1791 he tried to rescue Louis XVI. during the flight to Varennes. Having been exiled, he entered the Swedish army, and later served under Condé. Finally he settled in England in 1794, and died in London in 1800. In England he published (1797) *Memoirs relating to the French Revolution*. The letter referred to must have related to the treatment of Louis XVI., and the “denunciations” were of the French Revolutionists.

**The principles by which it was dictated**—*i.e.*, ‘the convictions that moved him to write the letter’; *i.e.*, loyalty to the monarchy.

**Catherine**—sister of John Johnson, See Notes to Letters 38 and 42.

**Dr. Kerr**—a doctor living at Northampton.

**Sick of his prescription**—‘feels ill after taking his medicine.’

**Pettitoes**—feet: a playful word, properly meaning the toes of a pig when cooked for food.

**For my own peculiar**—‘as regards myself particularly.’

**The Frogs**—Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton: see Note to Letter 40.

**Letter 46.** TO SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

*The Lodge, Dec. 21, 1791.*

**Samuel Rose**—see Note to Letter 37.

**To disappoint myself**—viz., by postponing Rose’s proposed visit.

**Vertigo**—giddiness (Latin, *vertere*—to turn). This was a stroke, or paralytic seizure. Cowper refers to Mrs. Unwin’s bad health in a letter to Lady Hesketh, July 7th, 1790, when the Doctor’s opinion was that hers was a case “perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side.”

**Letter 47.** TO THE REV. MR. GREATHEAD.

*Eartham, Aug. 3, 1792.*

This letter describes the journey of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to Eartham, a little sea-side place on the Sussex Coast, to stay at the house of his friend, W. Hayley. Hayley was an author and poet (born 1745 at Chichester, Sussex, and died 1820). He became popular as a poet on the publication of his *Triumphs of Temper* in 1781. In 1785 appeared an *Essay on Old Models*, and in 1794 a *Life of Milton*. His

*Life of Cowper*, published 1803, is the standard biography of the poet. Hayley first got to know Cowper in 1792, when, on February 7, he wrote to him on hearing that Cowper was engaged in preparing an edition of Milton's works, he himself having been engaged by another publisher to write a life of Milton. He disclaimed all rivalry, and enclosed a Sonnet addressed to Cowper praising his poetic gifts. As he did not know Cowper's address, Hayley sent this letter to his publisher's, where it lay some weeks before Cowper saw it. Cowper sent a friendly answer, and soon after Hayley visited him at Weston when Mrs. Unwin was attacked by paralysis, and it was he who suggested the electrical machine. He invited the two to Earham, with the hope that the change and sea-air might do Mrs. Unwin good. After great trepidation, (for Cowper had become such a recluse, that he had not left Olney or Weston for many years), they consented, and safely accomplished the three days' journey.

**Greathead**—The Rev. W. Greathead, a Non-conformist minister residing at Newport-Pagnell, near Olney.

**The most elegant mansion**—Hayley's house. He had built a beautiful house and laid out a beautiful garden, at Earham, spending on it more than he could really afford.

**Dissipated**—scattered.

**Buckinghamshire**—a flat country: where Olney is situated.

**Landscape**—view.

**The Isle of Wight**—across the Solent, as the sea-channel between England and the Island is called.

**Barnet**—in Hertfordshire, to the north of London. The journey was begun on August 1st, 1792, the party consisting of Mrs. Unwin, Cowper, and John Johnson, with Sam, the servant, and Beau, the dog, in attendance. They travelled in a four-horse coach, and reached Barnet the same evening. The second day they reached Kingston at midday, and slept at Ripley, in Surrey. The third evening they reached

**Eartham.** The whole journey was 120 miles, and could be done to day by train in a few hours. To Cowper, the hermit-poet, it seemed "a tremendous exploit."

**Disappointed**—*i.e.*, 'what I dreaded did not happen.' (*Disappoint* is generally used in a sorrowful sense, because it refers to the non-fulfilment of hopes: when, as here, it refers to the non-fulfilment of *fears*, it is generally qualified by such words as 'mercifully,' 'happily,' 'agreeably').

**Ripley**—near Guildford, in Surrey.

**Some terrors**—A hint of the susceptible and nervous temperament of the poet, due partly to long seclusion and partly to the effect on his constitution of his malady.

**Sussex Hills**—often called the Sussex Downs. They are low, rolling, open hills, where large flocks of sheep pasture. To Cowper's untravelled eyes they appeared mountains. Writing to Teedon, about this time, he says: "I indeed myself was daunted by the height of the Sussex hills, in comparison of which all that I had seen elsewhere are dwarfs."

**Terrestrial good**—'material comforts': good that owes its origin to earth, as distinguished from spiritual good, that comes from heaven.

**A Paradise**—Gibbon, the historian, often visited Hayley at Eartham, and was so charmed with his place that he called it "the little Paradise of Eartham" (For *Paradise*, see Note to Letter 35).

**Our host**—W. Hayley, the poet.

**Be apprised**—'get to know.'

**Letter 48.** TO MRS. COURTENAY, WESTON UNDERWOOD.

*Eartham, Sept. 10, 1792.*

This letter has an interesting reference to the French Revolution, then proceeding.

**Mrs. Courtenay**—Miss Catherine Stapleton married George, the younger brother of John Throckmorton (see Note to Letter 40), in June, 1792. As George had changed his name to "Courtenay" when his brother John succeeded to his father's title in 1791, his wife was called Mrs. Courtenay, and not Mrs. George Throckmorton. When the Throckmortons left Weston to reside at their seat at Bucklands, in Berkshire, the Courtenays came to Weston Hall to live. They were as friendly with Cowper as "Mr. and Mrs. Frog" had been; and Mrs. Courtenay had helped him much by making a fair copy of his translation of *Homer*.

**So uncourteous a knight**—one of the rules of chivalry was courtesy to ladies.

**To leave.....letters—i.e., unanswered.**

**The last, etc.**—because he expected to return to Weston and see her soon.

**Laudanum**—a preparation of opium; a poison, but taken in small doses as a sedative to induce sleep.

**Lethæan vapours**—'mists of dulness, or oblivion.' *Lethæan* is an adj. from *lethe* (Greek, = 'forgetfulness'), the name in Greek mythology of a river in Hades, or the world of the dead, the waters of which, when drunk by departed souls, made them forget all their earthly life.

**Intelligence**—news.

**Throckmortons**—Mrs. Courtenay's brother and sister-in-law. (See Note to Letter 40).

**The terrible 10th of August**—when the great insurrection carried out by the Jacobin party (the extreme section of the French Revolutionists), occurred. The king, Louis XVI., was suspended from his functions, his palace, the Tuileries, attacked and taken, and his Swiss guard cut to pieces. About 5,000 people were massacred that day in Paris.

**We are all of one mind, etc.**—Cowper expresses the opinions of moderate Englishman at that time. When the

Revolution first broke out, the freedom-loving English people were in sympathy with it and agreed with Fox; but in a short time, when the Revolutionists went to terrible excesses, they swung to the opposite extreme and followed Burke, who, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, strongly condemned the whole movement. It was only a minority who in 1792, like Cowper kept their heads, and, while condemning its excesses still, sympathised with the aims of the Revolutionary party.

**Parisians**—the Revolution began in Paris, and Paris was its leader throughout.

**Sanguinary proceedings**—massacres and wholesale executions of the aristocrats.

**Toast**—here, desire, wish—prayer. (*A toast* = the proposal of a person's health at a dinner, accompanied by drinking in his honour).

**Sobriety and Freedom, etc.**—i.e., “may the French have sobriety and freedom.”

**Articles**—particulars: i.e., as far as “speaking and walking” are concerned.

**Use her needles**—for knitting: see Letter Dec. 6, 1785.

**Doctor**—Dr. Grindon: see Letter 21.

**Epitaph**—see his poem, *Epitaph on Fop*,—a dog belonging to Lady Throckmorton.

**Perpetuated by the chisel**—i.e., ‘made permanent by being carved in stone.’ The epitaph was engraved on a stone monument in the Wilderness (see Letter 25), in Throckmorton's grounds.

**Romney**—George Romney, the portrait painter, and rival of Sir Joshua Reynolds, was a friend of Hayley's, and was invited to meet Cowper at Earham. There he painted Cowper's portrait,—a picture which he considered the most perfect representation of character he had even executed.



On his return to Weston, Cowper wrote "A Sonnet to George Romney, Esq., on his picture of me in crayons, drawn at Earham in the 61st year of my age." (Cf. Letter July 7, 1781). It begins:—

"Romney, expert infallibly to trace  
On chart or canvass, not the form alone  
And semblance, but, however faintly shewn,  
The mind's impression too upon the face,  
With strokes which time ought never to efface," etc.

**The man in the fable, etc.**—Referring to a Greek story of a native of Rhodes, who, on his travels, boasted of his jumping powers. When asked to give a specimen of his agility, he excused himself by saying he could only jump in his native land.

**George**—George Throckmorton, who changed his name to Courteney, and was the husband of Mrs. Courtenay.

**The tardiness of Andrews**—James Andrews (see Letter 5), was the local artist who gave Cowper drawing lessons. He had been commissioned to make a pedestal for a bust of Homer, given to Cowper by John Johnson. Andrews did not execute the order for nearly a year.

**William and Pitcairn**—local friends.

**Mrs. Buchanan**—see Note to Letter 44.

**Enow**—old plural form of *enough*: now obsolete, except in poetry.

**Letter 49.** TO THE REV. MR. HURDIS.

*Weston, Feb. 23, 1793.*

**Hurdis**—The Rev. J. Hurdis, rector of Bishopstone, in Sussex, and professor of poetry at Oxford. He wrote a poem called *The Village Curate*, and a tragedy on Sir Thomas More.

**My eyes**—see letter 13.

**Homer**—a second edition of his translation was being made ready, and Cowper was now revising his work,

**Your notes**—on Homer.

**Very much to the purpose**—very relevant; to the point; 'very useful to my purpose.'

**Poetry Professor**—Hurd was at this time applying for the post of Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He was appointed in this same year, in November.

**Sufficiency**—efficiency.

**One string to my bow**—i.e., 'only one resource,' 'only one means of assisting you.' The phrase 'to have two strings to one's bow,' means to have a second resource to fall back on if one should fail.

**In the natural way**—i.e., relating to Natural History.

**Gullet**—throat.

**Somewhat**—something.

**Minnows**—a minnow is a very small species of British fish living in fresh water. (Derived from Anglo-Saxon *myne*, a 'minnow,' from a root *min*, 'small': cf. minor, minute, etc.)

**Half-blown**—half-opened, half in bloom.

**Flower-borders**—beds of flowers bordering on the garden path.

**Spontaneity**—power of voluntary movement.

**Presently**—the old meaning of *presently* was "at present," i.e., now, at once: the modern meaning is "soon."

## Letter 50.

TO THOMAS PARK, ESQ.

W. U. July 15, 1793.

**Thomas Park**—the editor of Walpole's *Royal and Noble Authors*, and writer of *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*. He wrote to Cowper in Feb. 1792, and sent him some books, and Cowper replying, a friendly correspondence began between the two. In May, 1793, he gave Cowper a copy of Chapman's translation of *Homer*.

**Miss Knapps**—unknown.

**By favour of**—*i.e.*, through her: she brought the book.

**Chapman**—George Chapman (1557—1634), poet and dramatist. His famous translation of the *Iliad*, in English ballad metre, was published in 1610—11.

**Rarity.....curiosity**—A *rarity*=a rare, scarce book : a *curiosity*—a curious, odd book.

**With so little taste for Homer**, etc.—Chapman's translation is vigorous and interesting; but it is often careless, and does not keep closely to the original. Yet Keats gave it very high praise in his famous *Sonnet on first opening Chapman's Homer*.

**His information**—his knowledge of Homer in the original Greek : classical learning.

**Pope**—in his translation of the *Iliad*.

**Hobbes**—Thomas Hobbes (1588—1679), the philosopher and writer on politics, author of *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*. He published a translation of Homer in English verse in 1675 : but it is not considered to be of much value.

**Clumsiness**—awkwardness ; uncouthness.

**A very thick 12 mo** : *i.e.*, *duodecimo* : a book made of sheets folded so as to make *twelve* (Latin, *duodecim*) leaves. A *duodecimo* is a smaller size than an *octavo* ("eight") book ; and this again than a *quarto* ("four") book.

**A stall**—*i.e.*, not a regular book-shop, but a book-stall or temporary place for selling, especially, second-hand books.

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 34.

**My labours on the Iliad**—referring to his revision of his translation for the second edition.

**Your MSS.**—*viz.*, a poem of Park's sent to Cowper to be criticized.

**A poem of my own**—probably *The Four Ages*, see Letter 44.

**Your kind present**—*viz.*, Chapman's *Homer*.

**Letter 51.** TO MRS. CHARLOTTE SMITH.

Weston, July 25, 1793.

**Charlotte Smith**—she was a poet and author, who had met Cowper at Earham. She sent him a copy of her novel, *The Old Manor House*, published in 1793, and dedicated a poem of hers, called *The Emigrants*, to him. She died in 1806.

**Present**—her poem, *The Emigrants*.

**Tardiness**—slowness, dilatoriness.

**The waggon**—the mail-coach carried letters; parcels were sent by a slow, heavy waggon

**A delay that I would ill afford**—*i.e.*, “I was so impatient to get the present that I could ill spare the time consumed in waiting so long for it”: *i.e.*, the delay disappointed him.

**Whimsical**—fanciful: full of *whims*, or fancies.

**The acquisition**—*viz.*, of fame.

**Consummate delicacy**—perfect tact, and good feeling.

**Spare my blushes**—*i.e.*, ‘I had no need to blush, or feel modestly confused by the praise bestowed upon me.’

**The demand**, etc.—*i.e.*, Mrs. Smith’s praise of Cowper in her *Dedication* was so delicate and fair, that he felt that she had a claim on his gratitude, and that his modesty (humble estimate of his own poetic gifts) was in no way shamed.

**Monimia and Orlando**—the heroine and hero of Charlotte Smith’s novel, *The Old Manor House*. He calls them “old friends” because Charlotte Smith was writing this novel when she and Cowper were at Hayley’s house at Earham, and doubtless Cowper heard much about it and its characters at that time.

**Letter 52.** TO THE REV. MR. BUCHANAN.

Mundsley, Sept. 5, 1795.

After their return to Weston from Earham, both

Mrs. Unwin and Cowper became rapidly worse in health. Mrs. Unwin's paralysis increased, and her mind began to fail: Cowper sank into the deepest religious despair. In July, 1795, Hayley and John Johnson managed to remove them to Mundsley, on the Norfolk coast, in the hopes that the sea air would have a good effect. It will be noticed by the date of this letter that more than two years had passed since the date of the last, No. 51.

**Buchanan**—see Letter 44, Note.

**To interpose a little ease**, etc.—a quotation from Milton's *Lycidas*, 153—4. The passage in *Lycidas* means,

Let us thus, in order to comfort ourselves for a little, please our weak fancies by imagining,' etc. Its meaning as quoted here is made clear in the next sentence.

**Than as a curiosity**—This is a pathetic hint of Cowper's extreme despondency: he feels that no one can have any real interest in him, nor care to get a letter from him, except to see what sort of a letter a semi-insane man could write.

**Penury of employment**—in his melancholy state he could do no serious work.

**These blasts**—Mundsley is on the Norfolk coast, which gets the full force of the cold east winds which come from Russia across the North Sea.

**Salt spray**—from the sea.

**Inflammation in the eyelids**—see Letter 49.

**Confine me**—*i.e.*, keep me in the house.

**The beach**—the shore near the sea.

**At high water**—when the tide is in.

**Gratify me with**—give me pleasure by sending me, etc.

**Mr. Gregson**—The Roman Catholic priest who was chaplain to the Throckmortons: see Letter 30.

**The Courtenays**—see Note to Letter 48.

**My poor birds**—see Letter 21.

**This intrusion**—*i.e.*, this letter, which Cowper apologises for as though it were an intrusion on his correspondent. (To *intrude* = to thrust oneself on another's company uninvited).

**Letter 53.**

TO LADY HESKETH.

*Mundsley, Oct. 13, 1798.*

After a short stay at Mundsley, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin removed to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham, and finally (in 1796) to East Dereham. Two months after Mrs. Unwin died. Cowper survived her for three years, during the greater part of which time he was sunk in hopeless melancholy and mental helplessness. He had occasional returns of reason, during which he wrote a little—notably the terrible poem, *The Castaway*; but his letters almost entirely cease. This one is not quite the last he ever wrote (there survives one addressed to Newton dated April 11. 1799), but it is almost the last. And it is a pathetic witness to the state of mental dejection with which he had bravely struggled for so many years and which became his normal state in these last years of his life.

**Lady Hesketh**—see Note to Letter 27.

**Delightful scenes**—the scenery round Clifton in Somerset, near Bristol, on the river Severn. Lady Hesketh was living there as an invalid.

**To one**—*i.e.*, Cowper himself.

**Susceptible of**—capable of; open to.

**Such causes**—*viz.*, beautiful scenery.

**The country**—Somerset, which, with Devonshire, is noted for its beautiful scenery.

**The wretch**—the wretched person, *viz.*, himself.

**Her most ordinary dress**—*i.e.*, ordinary, commonplace scenes. (He means that he cannot admire natural scenery that has no particular beauty, and so he would

not be able to admire the very beautiful scenery Lady H. describes, or any like it).

**She**—i.e., Nature.

**An universal blank**—i.e., all Nature became empty of all meaning and beauty to him. Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III., 48, 49 :

“ Presented with a universal blank

Of Nature's works, to me expung'd and rased.”

**A different cause**—i.e., a cause different from blindness.

**Embellish a prospect**—make a view beautiful.

**An insipid wilderness**—an uninteresting desert. (*Insipid* = without “ taste.”)

**It neighbours**—it is situated near.

**As nearly resembles**—i.e., ‘its scenery is like that of.’

**Catfield**—see Letter 38: the place in Norfolk where Cowper's uncle, the Rev. Roger Donne, had lived, and where Cowper stayed when he was a boy.

**With what different**, etc.,—how differently does it impress me.

**My state of mind**—his melancholy and despair.

**Paradise**—Heaven; see Note to Letter 35.

**Be communicated**—i.e., ‘to me.’

**A wide interval**—Lady Hesketh was at Clifton, near Bristol, the other side of England.

**We shall meet no more**—a true prophecy. Lady Hesketh was now an invalid, and could not travel; and Cowper died a year and a half after the date of this letter.

**Mr. Johnson**—i.e., John Johnson. See Note to Letter 39.

**Such an event**—viz., their meeting again.

In a letter to Newton, dated April 11, 1799, apparently the last he ever wrote, Cowper expresses something of the

terrible despair which filled his heart in the last days of his life. Speaking of his former comparatively happy days, he says that then "I was little aware of what I had to expect, and that a storm was at hand which in one terrible moment would darken, and in another still more terrible blot out, that prospect" (*viz.*, an eternity spent in Heaven) "for ever." A year after writing this, April 25th, 1800, Cowper died peacefully at Dereham.

END.











